

# SCOTCH REELS

Scotland in Cinema and Television

EDITED BY COLIN McARTHUR



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# Introduction

COLIN MCARTHUR

There have been screen representations of Scotland and the Scots since the turn of the century and Scottish film culture began to have its own separate institutions and practices in the early thirties. It is curious, therefore, that these representations and sites of action have never become a focus of sustained debate in Scotland, far less elsewhere. The low profile of Scottish film culture is testified to by its having been evacuated entirely from a recent attempt – *A Companion to Scottish Culture* – to survey the national culture, both past and present. As far as the *Companion* is concerned, the Scottish Film Council, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Films of Scotland and even the most internationally eminent of Scottish film workers, John Grierson, might never have existed.

The omission, of course, speaks volumes about the conception of culture subscribed to by the *Companion*, but equally surely it is an indictment of the lack of self-definition of Scottish film culture itself. This volume is an attempt at the beginnings of such a definition, a shot at mapping the field, a throwing into relief of the major filmic representations of Scotland from other cultures, of the most important indigenous attempts at self-representation, and of the key Scottish institutions within and through which the manifold activities which make up a film culture – film production, distribution, exhibition, archiving and education – are carried on. It should be stressed that this is a beginning only: there is hardly the space to deal adequately with the complexities which surround the representation of Scotland on the screen, far less the historical development of the key institutions. It is hoped that this book will stimulate precisely the more detailed work necessary on these areas.

The task of putting this book together – and mounting the affiliated three-day discussion of Scottish film culture at the Edinburgh International Film Festival – has not been approached in a mood of academic detachment. The questions uppermost in the minds of those associated with the book and the event are why Scottish film culture is so limited in achievement, and what can be done about it. In this context it would be an error to view the limitations of Scottish film culture separately from the problems of Scottish culture as a whole. The socio-historical reasons why there is no confident, flexible, and – both historically and in contemporary terms – relevant Scottish national culture in which individual artists might find their place, have been set out at length by Tom Nairn in his 'Old and New Scottish Nationalism' (in *The Break-Up of Britain*), an essay which has resonances throughout this volume.



With the Union of 1707, whereby Scotland became a junior partner in a highly profitable imperial enterprise, and with a precocious industrial development well in advance of other European countries, Scotland was, in all essentials, cast in its modern politico-economic mould before the emergence of that most modern of mobilising ideologies – *nationalism*. As Nairn writes:

Amongst [the social strata which constructed modern nationalism in other European countries] none was more important than the intelligentsia. The new commercial and industrial middle class was indisputably the dominant force in the process: yet the way this dominance was exerted – the form of their class hegemony – owed its character to new intellectuals. It was the latter who formulated the new ideologies that were needed, and manned the first new societies, parties and other organisations . . . In Scotland the intelligentsia was deprived of this typical 'nationalist' role. Its new intellectual strata were to be, in a sense, unemployed on their home terrain. There was no call for the usual services.

Denied by history a place in the cadres of the forces of progress (a role exercised in the Scottish context mainly by industrialists, bankers and improving landowners) and shorn of the role of shaping – through particular works of art and polemic – the ideologies appropriate to a burgeoning nation, Scottish artists and intellectuals, where they did not leave Scotland and function solely within the discourses of other cultures, produced works in or about Scotland which were deformed and 'pathological'. Undoubtedly the most dominating of these 'pathological' discourses are Tartanry and Kailyard, traditionally a source of dismay and aversion to Scottish intellectuals, but regrettably not the object of any sustained analysis. An important exception is the exhibition, *Scotch Myths*, mounted by Barbara and Murray Grigor in St Andrews and Edinburgh in 1981. That event – a massive exposure and deconstruction of Tartanry and Kailyard as manifested in postcards, whisky bottle labels, shortbread tins, tea cloths, and music-hall songs – can truly be said to be the impulse, an interrogation of Scottish popular culture, from which the present volume has grown.

Cairns Craig, in the opening essay, describes Tartanry and Kailyard as they operated within nineteenth-century Scottish literature, most notably in the work of Sir Walter Scott and Sir J. M. Barrie. Murray Grigor's photo-essay reveals, among other things, the continuity of the Tartanry discourse from nineteenth-century easel-painting into cinema and brings that tradition – through a process of photomontage – into collision with the decaying landscape of cinema architecture in the present day. Colin McArthur examines the structuring force of Tartanry and Kailyard in filmic representations of Scotland, particularly those



formulated in England and Hollywood, but to some extent those made in Scotland and by Scots. The essays by Craig and McArthur are concerned about the seriously stunting effects Tartanry and Kailyard have had on the emergence of alternative discourses more adequate to the task of dealing with the reality of Scottish life. As Craig puts it:

. . . the problem that these mythic structures have left to twentieth-century Scottish art is that there are no tools which the artists can inherit from the past which are not tainted, warped, blunted by the uses to which they have been put. The speech of Lowland Scotland, the landscape of the Highlands have become clichés which need to acquire a new historical significance before they can be released into the onward flow of the present from the frozen worlds of their myths of historical irrelevance.

It is precisely this sense of looking for alternatives which induces McArthur to consider those ostensibly progressive and 'realistic' feature films, *Floodtide* and *The Brave Don't Cry*, which engage with modern, industrial Scotland, and the output of the (almost exclusively) documentary-based operation, Films of Scotland. Marking the vestiges, in that body's films, of Tartanry and Kailyard, McArthur assesses the extent to which the central corpus of Films of Scotland's films – that constructed within the canons of Griersonian documentary – proved an adequate alternative. Ultimately critical of these films, McArthur draws attention to a small number of (mostly) Films of Scotland's films which actively interrogate the traditions of Tartanry and Kailyard.

In many respects, the map-making, information-giving function of the book is carried in Jim Hickey's chronicle of Scottish film culture, which lists the major historical developments in the field, and in the interview with Forsyth Hardy. Hardy has been a key formative influence on every major Scottish film cultural institution. As a journalist on *The Scotsman* in the late twenties and early thirties he not only provided an influential critical commentary on the films being seen in Scotland, but polemicised on behalf of the emerging documentary idea (he was a close friend and associate of Grierson and his official biographer) and on behalf of the setting-up of the Scottish Film Council as a national body separate from the recently-formed British Film Institute. (The delegatory framework within which Hardy reveals the governing body of the SFC to have been set up goes some way to explaining its early coherence and energy and its later incapacity easily to encompass change when the original constituent groups had lost their initial impetus.) From being Secretary of the Scottish Federation of Film Societies, Hardy went on, in the forties and fifties, to become the senior civil servant in charge of wartime film production in Scotland, to co-found the Edinburgh International Film Festival and, for twenty years



from its inception in 1955, to be Director of Films of Scotland, the major source of indigenous film production. Throughout this astonishingly energetic and varied career — as the interview reveals — there is a remarkable continuity in Hardy's ideas about the cinema within which the Griersonian documentary idea is central. Both the interview and McArthur's essay pose questions about the adequacy of Griersonianism in dealing with the material reality of Scottish life.

Several of the essays posit some kind of socialist commitment as a necessary precondition for evolving an aesthetic able to deal with this reality. The essays by Douglas Allen and John Hill retrieve two such moments in the history of Scottish film culture.

Allen offers a detailed account of the operation of the Workers' Film Society movement, and its affiliate film-making operation, which flourished primarily in the thirties and in the West of Scotland and was (one of) the means whereby working people, and their allies from other strata, gained knowledge of the new Soviet cinema and focused their struggle against fascism. Cultural work of this kind had a meaning far beyond culture itself and should be seen as an important dimension of that tide of working-class and progressive feeling which culminated in the 'people's war' against fascism and the Labour Government of 1945.

Hill discusses *The Gorbals Story*, the only venture into cinema by the left-wing Glasgow Unity Theatre, and reveals the contradiction between the film's progressive political purpose and its aesthetic project, a fissure into which more than a few ostensibly progressive Scottish films have fallen. The essays by Allen and Hill are not simply exercises in socialist nostalgia. They are both very much concerned with the lessons to be learned from the material they deal with. In Hill's words:

. . . the 'recovery' of *The Gorbals Story* is not just about showing what Glasgow Unity was like . . . nor merely reversing the terms of conventional film historiography by demanding the inclusion of a hitherto neglected 'masterpiece' . . . The appropriate terminology is probably 're-insertion' rather than 'recovery': the re-insertion of the film back into a context and back into a critical perspective. To bother to do that at all is clearly to signal the film as in some way 'important' but it's also to suggest that as an example from the past it's not there simply to be celebrated or imitated but rather to be interrogated in such a way as to give it a use-value for the present.

Although the focus of the book is on Scottish *film* culture, it was felt desirable to include some initial discussion of Scottish television as well, partly because of the interpenetration of personnel and practices between the two areas, but more particularly to signal an awareness of television as a key site of debate and struggle in relation to Scottish culture.



John Caughie takes as read the fact that Scottish television is saturated with Tartanry and Kailyard (although they are located in a complex relationship with other specifically televisual discourses) and does not waste valuable space in making the case which has been made at length with regard to cinema and, anyway, which can be amply confirmed by a few hours in front of a TV screen anywhere in Scotland. Concentrating on the dramatic modes of Scottish television, what he does do is point to the lack of any engagement with the concept of Scottish culture there. Grasping culture as the site of national identity, he indicates a dilemma for those concerned with constructing a progressive Scottish culture. On the one hand, the posing of an always already existing Scottish identity tends to feed off those regressive discourses such as Tartanry and Kailyard which dominate Scottish cultural life. On the other hand, a more open, dialectical conception of Scottish identity, always in transformation, always in struggle, offers few, if any, fixed points round which political mobilisation can occur. This philosophico-political opposition is, of course, homologous with the aesthetic opposition between traditional realism and modernism which is referred to in several of the essays. Caughie's contention is that the two sides of the contradiction have to be held in some kind of balance and, given the particular configuration of forces in and around television, that a form of *naturalism*, perhaps on the model of certain Third World cinematic practices, offers the most potentially valid model for progressive work. In calling for a naturalism of this order in Scottish television, which engages with 'histories of resistance and struggle exemplified by Red Clydeside, the Crofters' Wars, or the Lanarkshire Weavers', Caughie's essay connects with an impulse strongly present in the book as a whole.

Shortly after this book appears – and hopefully fuelling the debate – there will be a three-day discussion at the Edinburgh International Film Festival of the nature and future of Scottish film culture. It is hoped that the event and the publication will help Scottish film workers to take stock of their situation, to question where they have come from and to clarify the directions they wish to go in. The debate is aimed not only at Scottish film-makers – crucial though they are – but at the whole range of people who inhabit Scottish film culture: the staff, and those who come within the orbit, of the major film cultural institutions such as the Scottish Film Council, the Edinburgh International Film Festival and the film production branch of the Scottish Arts Council; those who programme and attend the regional film theatres and film societies; the teachers who run courses on the cinema at various levels of the educational system; the journalists who regularly write and comment on the cinema in the press and on television; and those responsible for the formulation and funding of cultural policy in the main political parties in Scotland and in other Scottish institutions.

The present volume characterises Scottish film culture as profoundly

backward and underachieving, points to some of the historical and structural reasons for this, and proposes certain remedies.

Let the debate commence.



# 1 Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature

CAIRNS CRAIG

London, 1888. A young Scot, J. M. Barrie, publishes *Auld Licht Idylls*. Like Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) it is set two generations back from the writer's own experience, but what Barrie recalls and makes famous throughout the world is not the Scotland of romantic glamour, but a Scotland of parochial insularity, of poor, humble, puritanical folk living out dour lives lightened only by a dark and forbidding religious dogmatism. The Kailyard is established as the primary image of Scottish experience, a world concerned only with its own cabbage patch – which is the literal meaning of Kailyard – and unaware of the parochial absurdity with which it will be viewed by the outside world.

Two passages will make evident the absolute opposition between the Romantic and the Kailyard visions of Scotland. Here is *Waverley*'s encounter with the beautiful and noble Flora Mac-Ivor:

. . . A short turning in the path . . . suddenly placed Waverley in front of a romantic waterfall . . . After a broken cataract of about twenty feet, the stream was received in a large natural basin filled to brim with water, which, when the bubbles of the fall subsided, was so exquisitely clear that, although it was of great depth, the eye could discern each pebble at the bottom. Eddying round this reservoir, the brook found its way over a broken part of the ledge, and formed a second fall, which seemed to seek the very abyss . . . The borders of this romantic reservoir corresponded in beauty; but it was beauty of a stern and commanding cast, as if in the act of expanding into grandeur . . .

Here, like one of those lovely forms which decorate the landscapes of Poussin, Waverley found Flora gazing on the waterfall. Two paces further back stood Cathleen, holding a small Scottish harp . . . The sun, now stooping in the west, gave a rich and varied tinge to all the objects which surrounded Waverley, and seemed to add more than human brilliancy to the full expressive darkness of Flora's eye, exalted the richness and purity of her complexion, and enhanced the dignity and grace of her beautiful form. Edward thought he had never, even



in his wildest dreams, imagined a figure of such exquisite and interesting loveliness. (*Waverley*, chap xxii)

Everything here is an embodiment of the highest flights of the imagination: the setting has all the awe-inspiring grandeur of the sublime and its effect is to raise Flora almost to the status of a goddess, a creature of myth, with a 'more than human brilliancy'. Flora is here the archetype of Romantic Scotland, a world that has not been demeaned by modern civilisation and is still in touch with the nobility we associate with classical antiquity. Contrast that encounter with Barrie's presentation of courting couples in the village of Thrums, which is the scene of his tales of a community which is rigidly devoted to the old tenets – the 'auld licht' – of Scottish Calvinism and has not been softened in its religion by changes in the rest of the world:

When they had red up the house, the Auld Licht lassies sat in the gloaming at their doors on three-legged stools, patiently knitting stockings. To them came stiff-limbed youths who, with a 'Blawy nicht, Jeanie' (to which the inevitable answer was, 'It is so, Cha-arles'), rested their shoulders on the doorpost, and silently followed with their eyes the flashing needles. Thus the courtship began – often to ripen promptly into marriage, at other times to go no further. The smooth-haired maids, neat in their simple wrappers, knew they were on trial and that it behoved them to be wary. They had not compassed twenty winters without knowing that . . . Finny's grievance turned from Bell Whamond on account of some frivolous flowers in her bonnet . . . Some night Bell would have 'seen him to the door', and they would have stared sheepishly at each other before saying goodnight. The parting salutation given, the grievance would have stood his ground, and Bell would have waited with him. At last, 'Will ye hae's, Bell?' would have dropped from his half-reluctant lips; and Bell would have mumbled 'Aye', with her thumb in her mouth . . . The only really tender thing I ever heard an Auld Licht lover say to his sweetheart was when Gowrie's brother looked into Easie Tamson's eyes and whispered, 'Do you swite (sweat)?' Even the effect was produced more by the loving cast in Gowrie's eye than by the tenderness of the words themselves. (*Auld Licht Idylls*, chap iv)

No romanticism here: we are not conveyed into the realm of imaginative grandeur, but become peeping-toms on a world of grotesquely impoverished human potential. Kailyard's humour is based almost entirely on convincing the reader that he/she and the author share a sophisticated sense of the world, and that the characters whose lives they look down upon are backward, parochial, narrow-minded and utterly incapable of becoming conscious of the values by which they are being found comic.



The difference between these two versions of Scotland we might see in terms of the change in confidence that Scottish society had suffered in the 19th century. For Scott, Scotland is a place in which the highest potentialities of the human spirit can be found and can be striven for; he has behind him the great period of Scottish intellectual achievement characterised by David Hume and Adam Smith and the other luminaries of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It would be no surprise to discover that the other culture which shares the Scottish landmass, the Gaels, were capable of even higher achievements. For Barrie, though he is born into a Scotland which was experiencing an enormous economic growth, Scotland is a place to escape from, a cultural wasteland whose values are inimical to the imagination, as revealed by this symbolic conclusion to *Auld Licht Idylls*:

It was from Sandersy that Tammas Haggart bought his copy of Shakespeare, whom Mr Dishart [the minister] could never abide. Tammas kept what he had done from his wife, but Chirsty saw a deterioration setting in and told the minister of her suspicions. Mr Dishart was newly placed at the time and very vigorous, and the way he shook the truth out of Tammas was grand. The minister pulled Tammas the one way and Gavin pulled him the other. But Mr Dishart was not a man to be beaten, and he landed Tammas in the Auld Licht kirk before the year was out. Chirsty buried Shakespeare in the yard. (chap. xii)

The author, writing in English, committed to the culture of Shakespeare, mocks by the very form of his own work the attempt to suppress the outside world, the world of culture, in which his characters are engaged. Author and community have nothing in common. Barrie is not expressing the values of the Auld Lichts, but using them as a reinforcement of the presumed values he shares with the literary culture he aspires to join. And yet that doubleness is also there in Scott. Scott may have popularised the notion of a romantic Scotland, but he did so without subscribing to that romanticism himself. For Scott, the world of the Jacobites is a world as false to the true needs of civilisation as Barrie's Auld Lichts are to the true needs of culture. Romantic glamour is an illusion in which the reason is suppressed by the power of the imagination in defiance of the best interests of humanity. By both authors the reader is invited into a Scottish world only to have revealed its hollowness, its inadequacy to the complex reality of modern life.

That Barrie and Scott held such views would be of little consequence in itself, but conditions in nineteenth-century Scotland would not let works of literature rest within the realms of literature. The worlds described by Scott and Barrie became the foundation of myths of national identity in a country whose individual identity had been swamped by its incorporation into the United Kingdom. That they should be



turned into myths is not surprising. Throughout Europe peripheral cultures were striving to assert the integrity of their own traditions by discovering or manufacturing legends, symbols, heroic figures upon which could be focused the sense of an identity continuing unchanged through all the fluctuations of history. It was the trappings of such an identity that Scott provided – the clans, the tartans, the high nobility of an epic grandeur – but that myth never came to fruition in a cultural nationalism in Scotland such as can be found in Norway or Ireland or many of the areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By concentrating its focus on the 1745 Rebellion, the myth had inscribed upon it the inevitable historical defeat of the identity which it offered for the Scots. It was not an identity existing beyond history which could find its application at any particular moment and through any specific contemporary situation: it was an identity lost and irrecoverable.

The reason that it was beyond recovery was that the class which fostered such myths of identity in the rest of Europe, the educated middle class, was, in Scotland, committed to assimilation to the values of English culture in order to fulfil its role within the Empire. The educated middle classes in Scotland might give momentary acceptance to the tokens of identity which the Jacobite cause had made available, but it was necessarily an identity which the further progress of civilisation – i.e. of incorporation into the British ethos – would completely efface. Those tokens could be used cynically for the purposes of the Empire, as, for instance, in their encouragement by the British Army in order to create a sense of regimental honour and individuality, but they were not allowed to act as a challenge to the existing values of modern Scotland.

In Ireland, the romantic nationalist poet, W. B. Yeats, was to show how a Celtic heritage could, even in an English-speaking environment, be made active in contemporary politics. No Scottish writer could have brought myth and history together, as Yeats did with his epic hero Cuchulain and the leader of the 1916 uprising, Pearse:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side  
What stalked through the Post Office?  
(‘The Statues’)

Such a conjunction was made impossible because the tartan myth was a myth of historical redundancy, and being redundant its images declined (as Yeats said the ancient gods of Ireland had declined to leprechauns) from the noble stature of *Ossian* and Scott’s Jacobites to the parodic red-nosed, kilted, drunken, mean Scotsmen of music hall comedy and picture postcard jokes. And yet Scottish culture was not absorbed into a British ethos so totally that it needed no separate expression of its identity. The vacuum left by the decline of the Jacobite myth was filled by an alternative myth drawn from Lowland rather than Highland ex-



perience, the myth that was given its fullest expression in the works of the Kailyard writers, J. M. Barrie, Ian MacLaren and S. R. Crockett, in the late 1880s and 1890s.

Kailyard has haunted twentieth-century Scottish writers because its phenomenal international success established an image of Scotland as parochial and narrow-minded from which it has been hard to escape. Languages are not neutral conveyers of information, but have identifiable social and ideological connotations. What Kailyard did was to turn the language of Lowland Scots into a medium necessarily identified with a couthy, domestic, sentimental world. After Kailyard it becomes impossible to give expression to a vernacular working-class environment in Scotland without provoking those connotations. But it is important to recognise that Kailyard's success is not just the exploitation of Scottish lower-class life by exiled Scots for a public largely made up of exiles who want to remember, nostalgically, the land they have left behind, but also want to be convinced that they were right to leave it behind. Kailyard also gave expression to the only class in Scotland which still felt itself to have, or to be burdened with, a separate identity – the working class. And if that class found its experience and its language, however partially, mirrored in Kailyard works, it is not something we should scoff at. In a society in which the middle class had abdicated responsibility for any sense of national identity it was only in and through works of popular fiction, with all the inadequacies that the genre necessarily invites, that the working class could find an expression of its own lifestyle. That life might be projected on to the plane of arca-dian myth in Kailyard works, but within the generic expectations of such a style the works might still have fulfilled the needs of that new audience among the literate working class of the 1880s and 1890s. It is testimony, perhaps, to the long traditions of literacy among the lower classes in Scotland that it is Scotland which provides the most successful version of the literature for this new mass public.

But what cripples Kailyard writing is the fact that the authors, like the rest of middle-class Scotland, have already made their commitment to English culture. The caricature, simplification and condescension of Kailyard writing are not merely literary styles, they are there to ensure that the author is seen, like middle-class Scotland in general, to be keeping his distance from a national identity from which he wished to be absolved. What has to be elided from that mythic world, therefore, is any suggestion that there could be a positive development of the culture from *within* the social classes portrayed by the writer. Since that culture is one the author has escaped from, the whole development of the society has to be seen as requiring no continuation of the society from which he has escaped. Thus Kailyard is sited among the dying sect of the Auld Lights, or the disappearing world of the peasant farmer. It is a world at death's door precisely so that its values cannot impinge directly upon the



contemporary world in which we will continue to live. It is a world full of religious conflicts which, from the perspective of the 1980s, will seem absurdly irrelevant debates about petty distinctions. What it does not contain is any political or social conflict, because such conflict would have brought into focus the tension between the different meanings different groups of readers would ascribe to Kailyard – authentic expression of lower-class life or parodic justification of a middle class's assimilation to a higher culture.

Barrie, at least, seems to have been, or to have become, aware of the necessary falsification of the past which his Kailyard stories imply. In a late tale called *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan*, he reveals what the mythicising imagination suffers when it encounters the reality of the world it has locked into fixed pattern. The story is told by a minister, by the retrogressively innocent name of Adam Yestreen, who falls in love with a lady, Julie Logan, who turns out to be a shade, one of the mythic 'Strangers, come trailing back into the present day under a command to honour and feed one who had long ago been left behind' – i.e. Prince Charlie. Out of the ghost world Adam's beloved comes to meet him, carrying the basket of food she once carried to the hunted Chevalier. As Yestreen is fording a stream with her in his arms, taking her back to his manse and to his own time, she reveals the one thing that will make him drop her:

I lifted her in my arms, and in the exultation of my man's strength she was like one without weight. I carried her into the burn. It was deep and sucking . . . 'Hold me closer,' she said, 'lest by some dread mischance you should let me slip.' I held her closer. 'Adam dear,' she said, 'it is this, I am a Papist.' At that awful word I dropped her in the burn . . .

Like Lowland Scotland when it made an emblem of lost nationality out of the Jacobites, Yestreen has elided from memory the essential fact about the Rebellion, the central historical reality behind it – that it was an attempt to reinstitute a catholic, feudal, absolutist monarchy in Britain. The truth of the past can be ignored as long as the past is regarded as dead and cut off from the present, but as Adam carries that shade back into the substantial reality of the present its full meaning is made manifest again.

The fact, however, that Barrie had to use the myth of the Jacobites and not his own Kailyard ethos to expose the falsification of history is significant. Nineteenth-century Scotland remains a world in limbo, given shape only in the rigid configurations of those Kailyard communities on the edge of extinction. But revealing a concealed political reality behind a Rebellion which has ceased to pose any threat to the present is very different from acknowledging the threatening possibility that lower-class communities will not continue in passive acceptance of



the forces of history which make them redundant or which reduce them to spectators of their own fate. It is precisely the possibility of significant change directed from within the Scottish community itself that the myths of Tartanry and Kailyard have been invented to conceal. All the dynamic of the society must come from without or from above and the processes which are working through it must be so ineluctable and inevitable as to offer no occasion for the intervention of the community to direct its own future. It is a distinguishable future which these myths of the Scottish identity insist is impossible: it is the power to *imagine* the future and so take control of it that they both lack and deny. Scott gives a powerful image of such a condition in his Postscript to *Waverley*:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745 . . . commenced this innovation . . . But the change, though steadily and rapidly progressive, has, nevertheless, been gradual, and like those who drift down the stream of a deep and smooth river, we are not aware of the progress we have made, until we fix our eye on the now distant point from which we have drifted.

The past has a distinguishable history, which the novel *Waverley* has charted, but once the dramatic eruption of the '45 is over, and that identity for Scotland proved false, what we are left with is an unconscious drift on the force of progress. There is no story, no drama in this modern world: there is only the retelling of the redundant forces of the past to give us a sense of our present direction. But the forces which carry us forward are, literally, *unimaginable*, and the imagination has no choice but to find a secure location for itself in a past divorced from the present. The present, therefore, is lost to us: like sleep walkers we glide on the surface of life's deeps.

It is this which unites the myths of a noble Celtic world and a mundane, parodic lowland one. Tartanry and Kailyard, seemingly so opposite in their ethos, are the joint creations of an imagination which, in recoil from the apparently featureless integration of Scottish life into an industrial culture whose power and whose identity lies outside Scottish control, acknowledges its own inability to lay hold of contemporary reality by projecting itself upon images of a society equally impotent before the forces of history.

This turning of the back on the actuality of modern Scottish life is emblematically conveyed in the figure of Harry Lauder — Kailyard consciousness in tartan exterior — who evacuates from his stage persona, indeed from his total identity, the world of the Lanarkshire miners from which he began. What Lauder describes as happening to him in his first days as a performer is what all Kailyard and Tartanry strive after:



... I loved every minute of it. Compared with my life as a miner I felt like a bird suddenly liberated from its cage. It seemed as though some good fairy had waved her wand over me and had changed all the drabness of life, the colourlessness of my former existence, into the romance of travel, the glory of fresh air, sunlight, freedom.

The magic of imagination is not directed towards a transformation of the real world or a transcendence of it, only to an escape from it, an evasion achieved by retreating into a second-hand, mythic past.

Having become myth the communities which are described within Tartanry and Kailyard are totally unresponsive to change. Barrie, for instance, in creating Peter Pan as the boy who never grew up, was only personifying the sense of the world which dominates his Auld Licht tales: 'The world remains as young as ever. The lovers that met on the commonty in the gloaming are gone, but there are other lovers to take their place.' Because the world that Barrie is describing is held only in the memory it has ceased to be susceptible to real change. It becomes an image of all that cannot change in human life: 'The world does not age. The hearse passes over the brae and up the straight burying-ground road, but still there is the cry for the christening robe.' (*A Window in Thrums*, chap. 1). The characteristics of the natural world, however, are transferred to the social world in order to negate its actual historical development. The dying-out of the weavers becomes an instance of the fact that death waits for us all, not of the particular changes in Scottish society and in the industrial economy which supersede their mode of production. The leap from the particular to the metaphysically general occludes what lies between: the processes of social change, of history.

Equally, Waverley at the conclusion of Scott's novel is confronted by 'a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky and mountainous path, down which the clan were descending in the background.' What links the Waverley of the painting with the Waverley who has become a landed gentleman owning such a painting is, though it is the subject of the novel itself, occluded. The process of history disappears out of life by being reduced to an imaginative construction held within its own frame, its own frame of reference. Art becomes a realm of romantic nostalgia incapable of communicating with the real world in which the characters now live. And it is for this reason that twentieth-century Scottish writers have so often needed to commit themselves to the possibility of a socialist transformation of the society before they can imaginatively grasp its present reality. Only by giving back a future to the world which Tartanry ignores and which Kailyard suppresses into static passivity can the dynamic of the present be envisaged, be *presented*. For the problem that these mythic structures have left to twentieth-century Scottish art is that there are no tools which the artist



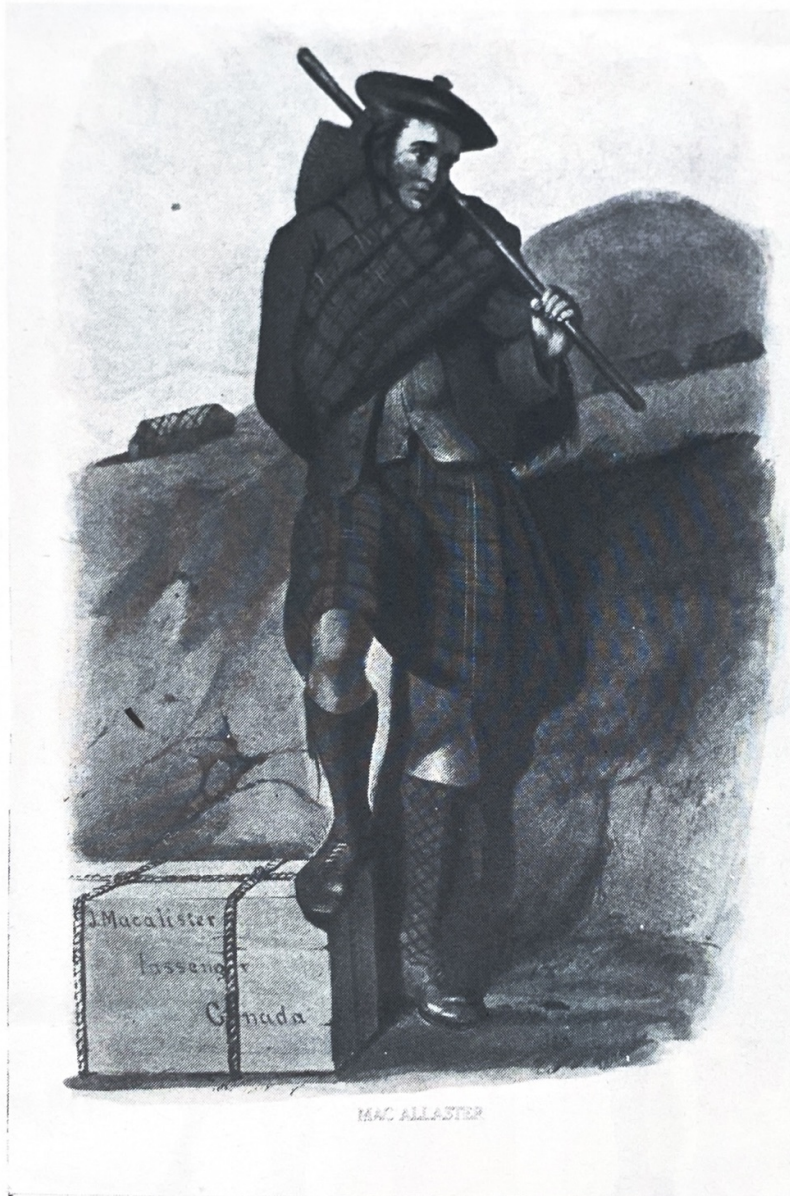
can inherit from the past which are not tainted, warped, blunted by the uses to which they have been put. The speech of Lowland Scotland, the landscape of the Highlands have become clichés which need to acquire a new historical significance before they can be released into the onward flow of the present from the frozen worlds of their myths of historical irrelevance. And what that historical significance needs, of course, if it is to come into being, is a sense of the nation's particular and individual development, both past and future.

An emblem for conclusion: the home of the Kailyard in the 20th century is the Dundee publishing company of D. C. Thomson, which produces *The Sunday Post* with its comic-strip, Kailyard inhabitants *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie*. Each week, across Scotland, these newspapers are carried in mist grey vans with no identifications, no trade marks. They have no markings because Thomson's distribution was interrupted by pickets during the 1926 General Strike. Their external lack of identity, allowing them to pass unheeded through the industrial conflicts of modern Scotland, is but the other side of the coin that is made by offering Kailyard as a national identity through the newspapers which those vans distribute: the unidentifiable, unquestionable, unopposable drift of progress founded on the static configuration of a harmonious, apolitical, unreal past.



## 2 From Scotland to Disneyland

MURRAY GRIGOR



### Plate A

Banned for almost a generation after the '45, the wearing of the tartan was wholly legitimised, and appropriated when George IV appeared kilted in Edinburgh in 1822. Tartan gave way to Tartanry in a massive mythicising surge with Maclan's prints, as above, offering historically inaccurate but ideologically fulfilling models for Victorian Scots bent on constructing their own personal Scottish past.





#### Plates B/C

One act of ideological signification feeding off another: the military artist William Skeoch Cumming (1864-1924) photographed his servant in poses and dress inspired by the Maclan prints as a prelude to constructing large tapestries.





Plates B/C





Plates B/C (continued)



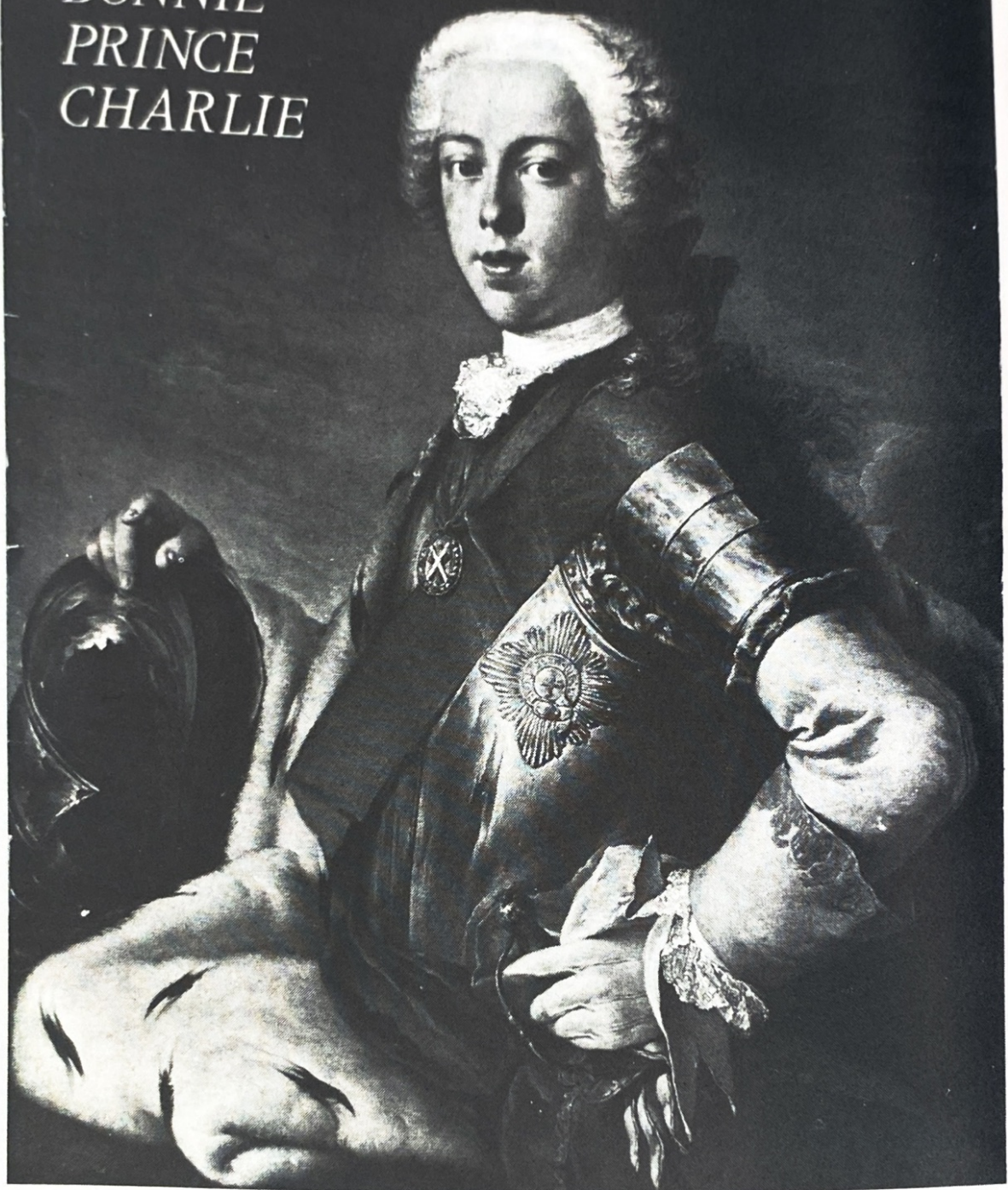


**Plate D**

Tapestries like *Prayer For Victory: Prestonpans 1745* gave Skeoch Cumming's contemporaries a foretaste of widescreen cinema.



BONNIE  
PRINCE  
CHARLIE



Plates E/F

Continuity of Representation: the Romantic Hero Par Excellence.





David Niven in *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1948)

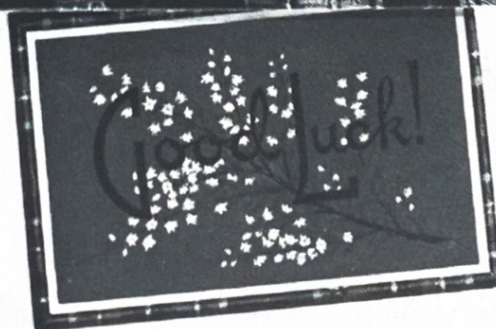




**Plates G/H**

Hollywood appropriates Scotland: Shirley Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie* (1938)





Scotland appropriates Hollywood





**Plates I/J**

Tartanry registers its presence on the silent screen

*Annie Laurie* (1918)





*The Young Lochinvar* (1923)



*Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1923)





Plates K/L  
Continuity of representation  
*Rob Roy* (1922) . . .





to *Brigadoon* (1954)





**Plates M/N**

Recurrent Icon: the raising of the Jacobite standard at Glenfinnan as constructed by Skeoch Cumming . . .





. . . and Anthony Kimmins (1948)





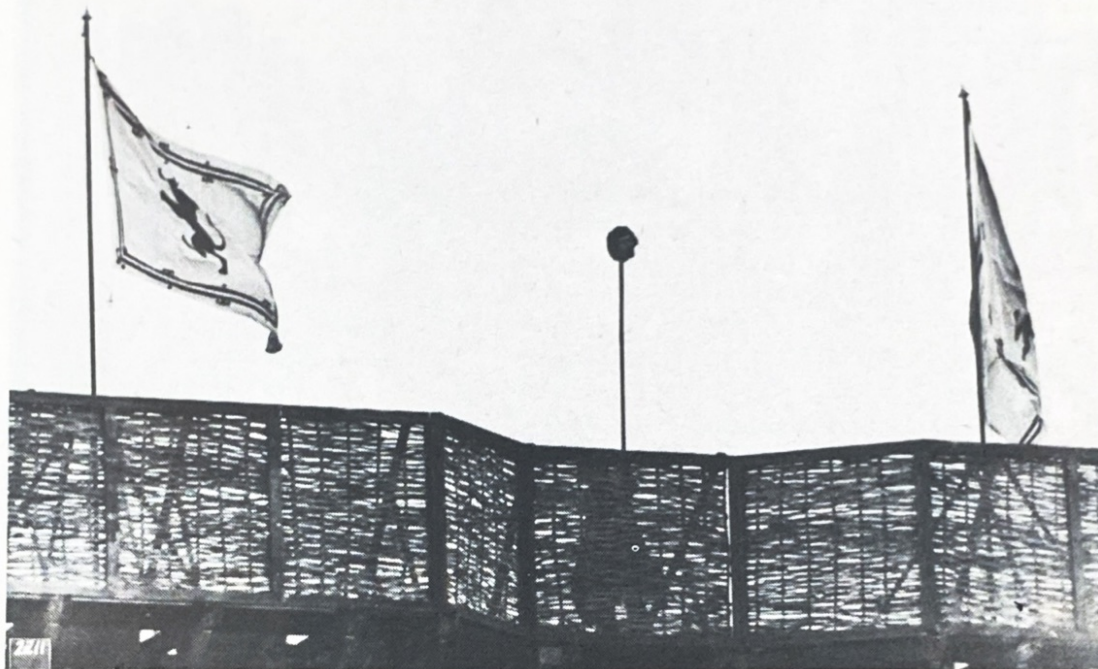
**Plates O/P**

Recurrent Icon: Culloden as  
constructed by David Morier . . .



. . . and Peter Watkins (1964)





**Plates Q/R**

Scotland the Bizarre: Macbeth as seen by Roman Polanski (1971 — top) and Orson Welles (1948 — bottom)





Plate S  
 Disney's *Edinburgh: Greyfriars Bobby* (1960)





Plate T  
Abstract Tartanry: *Happy Go Lovely* (1951)





**Plates U/V**

There was a soldier . . .

Skeoch Cumming's picture of the Afghan wars





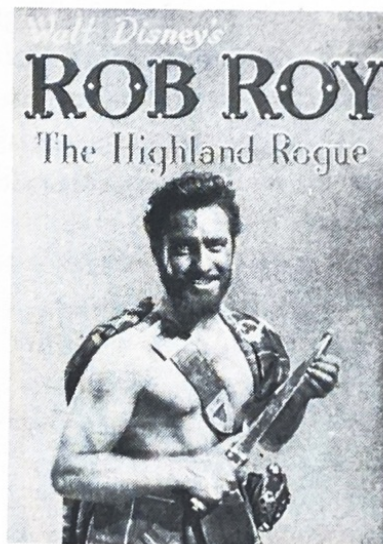
. . . and Laurel and Hardy in *Bonnie Scotland* (1935)





Plate W  
Tartanry's ruined castles





**Plate X**  
 Disney: the Apotheosis of the Tradition  
 (*Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue* — 1953)



### 3 Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers

COLIN McARTHUR

. . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation. (*Exodus* chap. 34, v.7)

The place, Texas; the time, that indeterminate period between the ending of the Civil War and the closing of the frontier which all moviegoers recognise as the span of the Western. The characteristic iconography and narrative form of that genre begin to unfold: dusty terrain and isolated homestead; an attack by Mexican bandits with sombreros slung round their necks; the ride to the rescue by the seven sons of the homestead. But perhaps there is something out of the way about this family; something rarely seen in the Western. One of the retreating bandits says 'I'd rather fight a tribe of Apaches'; the sons of the family are querulous and argue about whisky; one of them is excessively religious; the womenfolk are hospitable to a fault. The homestead's walls are hung with tartan, eighteenth-century pistols and claymores. The older menfolk wear kilts and bonnets and there is even a running gag about thriftiness. The family is, indeed, constructed within an armature of what are popularly, but misleadingly, called *stereotypes* of the Scots but which ought more accurately to be called discursive positions<sup>1</sup> relating to Scotland.

What is most startling of all, however, is that the film is called *Sette pistole per i MacGregor* (*Seven Guns for the MacGregors*) (1965): it is one of the so-called Spaghetti Westerns cycle of the sixties and seventies. An Italo-Spanish co-production, it was written by four Italians, was directed by another, and has a cast made up primarily of Italians and Spaniards.

These facts are noted not to sneer at Italian Westerns nor to impugn the legitimacy of one society representing another in its art, but to demonstrate that the melange of images, characters and motifs constituting Tartanry and Kailyard is not only the framework within which Scots largely construct themselves but is also the grid within which other cultures construct the Scots.

The reasons why Italian cinematic culture in the mid-sixties comes to construct Scotland and the Scots within the categories evident in *Seven*



*Guns for the MacGregors* are complex and, historically, far-reaching. The generative cause was, of course, that massive act of 'symbolic appropriation'<sup>2</sup> in the 18th century whereby rationalist, scientific Europe defined its own identity by fashioning the identity of the peoples on its periphery (and those it encountered in colonial conquest) in terms of a set of binary oppositions to the qualities it most celebrated in itself. In true dialectical style, this had the effect of hatching, within Europe, the complex set of identifications with its own constructed alter ego retrospectively described as Romanticism. Within this process, Scotland was ripe, geographically and historically, to become the Romantic domain *par excellence* which, with the advent of MacPherson's *Ossian* and Sir Walter Scott, duly happened. Thereafter, the causes relate to the appropriation, within Italian Romanticism, of Scott's novels and their widespread adaptation into plays and operas in the 19th century; the popular perception of Scotland through travel books and, later, through photographic and fashion magazines; and, not least, Italian access to filmic representations of Scotland and the Scots produced inside the UK itself and in other cultures. In most of these, the dominant discourses were Tartanry, Kailyard or hybrids of the two. This hybridization of the two discourses is very important. Axiomatically it could be asserted that representations of Scotland and the Scots offer tartan exteriors and Kailyard mores.



Constructing Scottish baronialism in *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1923)



From the silent cinema onwards there have been representations of Scotland and the Scots on the screen. The history of these representations remains to be written, and would have to take account of documentary as well as fictional cinema, but it is a fairly safe bet that the traditions of Tartanry and Kailyard, and hybrids of the two, would loom large. With regard only to the narrative fiction film, it is significant that one of the earliest such films was *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1923), the well-known story of which sounds again the elegiac note of the Ossian cycle. *The Young Lochinvar* (1923) was already articulating for the cinema the discourse which can usefully be called *baronialism* whereby much of the Tartanry dimension of cinema is carried. As well as offering the pictorialism of Scottish scenery, *baronialism* offers a site, the dark Scottish castle, within which certain kinds of specifically 'Scottish' stories – principally hinging on treachery and the betrayal of hospitality – can be played out.

The Kailyard dimension in cinema is carried in the early days by adaptations of the most popular Kailyard novels such as *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1921) and *The Lilac Sunbonnet* (1922). A concern to define the essential 'Scottishness' of Kailyard should not obscure the extent to which it forms part of the corpus of popular sentimental literature of the late 19th and early 20th century. It is this literature, and the more hardboiled literature which succeeded it in popular taste in the post-First World War period, which the cinema has consistently fed on and, in return, has nourished. A concern therefore with popular sentimental forms is evident right from the beginnings of cinema (the films of D.W. Griffith provide the best-known examples). The immense popular success of the Kailyard novels in the UK and the USA ensured that they would rapidly become cinema fodder. This joined with other internationally important sentimental Scottish material of the time (most notably the songs and stage routines of Harry Lauder) to ensure that 'Scottishness' was signified from very early on in the cinema. Like the novels themselves, the films based on them are primarily machines for producing tears and, to a certain extent, wry laughter. The decline of sentimental forms in popular taste (or their sophistication and toughening in such cinematic genres as the woman's picture) has meant that later versions of cinematic Kailyard have increasingly foregrounded the comic aspects.

The operation of 'classical' Kailyard in the cinema is best exemplified by *The Little Minister* (1934), the last of three film adaptations of Barrie's novel. To emphasise its relatedness to other popular sentimental impulses in early cinema, its tear-producing mechanisms are primarily centred on elderly mothers<sup>3</sup> and children, the two elderly mothers being played by actresses (Mary Gordon and Beryl Mercer) who fulfilled similar roles in other forms – the latter was James Cagney's mother in *The Public Enemy* (1931). Some indication of the emotional register in





The Kailyard tear-machine in *The Little Minister*





which *The Little Minister* functions can be got from the playing and the dialogue of Mary Gordon on her imminent removal to the poor house: 'Oh mither, mither, you little thocht when you bore me that I would come to this . . .' The signifying of 'Scottishness' in *The Little Minister* is conveyed in the marked 'Stage Scots' of most of the players, in the fey quality of the playing, in the dress and decor (baronial in Lord Rintoul's castle, rustic elsewhere) and, very centrally, in the music involving at various times 'Loch Lomond', 'The Campbells are Coming', 'Comin' Thro the Rye', 'The Bluebells of Scotland' and a pastiche Scottish air specially written for the film, 'Scotch Love'. As in the original novel, potentially disruptive elements in the film – the weavers' riot against increased charges for materials, the sending in of the military to quell them, and the ostracising of the local constable – are either heavily recuperated or rendered comic. To have dealt adequately with these elements the film would have had to crack itself apart, to pull back into history a community that the very form of Kailyard had rendered history-less.

Pre-war films like *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, *The Young Lochinvar*, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* and *The Little Minister* articulated into cinema the discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard, the roots of the former going back to the 18th century and those of the latter to the 19th century. From these roots the discourses entered various forms and artefacts: poems, novels, operas, paintings, prints, photographs,



Katharine Hepburn's fey Scottishness in *The Little Minister*



postcards, shortbread tins and soft furnishings as well as films and, later, television programmes. Since there were simply no alternative traditions of representation with comparable power, the tendency was for any film dealing with Scotland, or having a Scot as a character, to be pulled strongly towards the armature of images, characters and stories making up Tartanry and Kailyard. Thus it was exploited in several films of the thirties, both British and American, dealing with Scottish soldiers on the Northwest Frontier of India: *The Drum* (1937), *Gunga Din* (1939), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), *Bonnie Scotland* (1935). The armature was flexible enough to include anti-Kailyard elements (much as the novel *The House With the Green Shutters* was written in opposition to, and therefore defined itself within, Kailyard). In this respect the predominantly baronial construction of Scotland in *The 39 Steps* (1935) could include the darkly Calvinist figure of John Laurie's cotter and a post-war film like *The Hasty Heart* (1950), although set in the Far East, could construct its whole *raison d'être* round the archetypal querulousness of the Scot.

In the decade and a half following the Second World War, however, there emerged the remarkable series of representations of Scotland which constitute the definitive modern statements of Tartanry and Kailyard in the cinema. Since the days of Alexander Korda in the thirties, the Holy Grail which the British film industry had sought (and had failed to find) was penetration of the American market. Its consistent



Scottish militarism deflated: Laurel and Hardy in *Bonnie Scotland*



strategy for achieving this was the making of costly costume dramas such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), *Rembrandt* (1936) and, abortively, *I, Claudius* (1937), under Korda in the thirties, and the Gainsborough pictures such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945) and *The Man in Grey* (1948) in the forties. It was within this strategy (which ironically has proved successful in the context of television with *The Forsyte Saga* (1966); *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1975); and *Edward and Mrs Simpson*



Tartanry and the picturesque: Richard Todd in *Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue*



(1978)) that the first of the two major Romantic constructions of Scotland was produced – *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1948). The second, *Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue* (1953) was a production of the Disney Company whose sentimental conception of cinema on several occasions found expression in Scottish whimsy (e.g. *Kidnapped* (1960), *Greyfriars Bobby* (1961) and *The Three Lives of Thomasina* (1964)), which, needless to say, allowed free passage to Tartanry and Kailyard. Every frame of these two films recapitulates the visual style of easel-painting representations of the Scotland constructed in the European imagination in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and the characters and actions relate to the same Ossianic tradition: warlike heroes; wan maidens; wise, white-haired patriarchs; blind seers and treacherous enemies. The cinematic apotheosis of this tradition is both articulated and deconstructed in the American film *Brigadoon* (1954). At one level it takes the Romantic representation of Scotland as a given, but at another level – that of the working through of the personal obsession of its director, Vincente Minnelli, with the question of illusion and reality – this representation is revealed as the dream *par excellence*, as a fiction created to escape from the urban horrors of the 20th century. No British feature film has the progressive force of *Brigadoon* in this regard.

Like *Bonnie Prince Charlie* and *Rob Roy*, the cluster of comedy films which emerged in the late forties and in the fifties, for example *Whisky Galore* (1949), *Laxdale Hall* (1952), *The Maggie* (1953) and *Rockets Galore* (1958), while offering a representation of Scotland and the Scots, were meaningful along another axis, this time a British social axis. Not all of these films emerged from the Ealing studio, but all had about them the 'feel' of the Ealing ethos discernible across a wide range of that studio's films. Central to this was a detestation of modernity as it related to the city and to the power of capital (though the films are by no stretch of the imagination pro-socialist; they are rather pro-feudal) and particularly to the power of central government bureaucracy. Set against these ills, the films construct a set of contrary humane values invested in a range of lovable rural eccentrics and non-conformists.

Their narratives are constructed in terms of the modern world (represented by English soldiers, an American tycoon, English MPs and Glasgow poachers) getting its come-uppance at the hands of the shrewd and canny highland Scots. *The Maggie*, directed by a Scot, Alexander Mackendrick, represents Scotland at its most self-lacerative. Precisely at the moment, the early fifties, when the massive penetration of American capital into Scotland was gathering pace, *The Maggie* actually sets the two halves of the contradiction – American entrepreneur and Scottish workers – in opposition to each other, but with almost wilful perversity the film has the Scots win hands down. In true Kailyard style, what is not achievable at the level of political struggle is attainable



in the delirious Scots imagination. Having given the powerful Americans their come-uppance, there was no stopping the breast-beating Scots. In 1955, with *Geordie*, they showed the world – by having the kilted figure of the title win the hammer event at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics – that, whatever historical processes might be doing to Scotland, it was still (in a phrase attributed to Ally Macleod) 'the best wee nation ever God put breath in'.



American enterprise and English aspirations outfoxed by canny Scots: *The Maggie* . . .



The objective function of popular cinema is very often to paper over the cracks in the society, to mask contradictions. This has been a particularly urgent task for British cinema in its representations of Scotland as the clear benefits to Scotland of being a junior partner in imperial exploitation give way to the disabilities of being tied to a post-imperial geriatric with undiminished ambition for maintaining great-power status. The ideological manoeuvre whereby this contradiction is masked is most clearly evident in *Rockets Galore* (1958) which, characteristically, reserves its most carefully-mounted scenes for images of the Scots lamenting the putative loss of their island with dignity, and – unlike the actuality of these things – draws back from the brink of evicting the people by giving them the canny ruse of painting some seagulls pink and having the island declared a bird sanctuary. With a nod, a wink and a dram the Scots once more triumph at the level of the imagination while in the real world their country gets pulled out from under them.

In certain respects these films draw on the Romantic tradition of hills, lochs and sea and contain generic elements (e.g. the rounding off with a ceilidh) which link them to, say, *Rob Roy*. These films, particularly *Laxdale Hall* and *Geordie*, are in a very precise sense politically reactionary in that they restore and sanctify the quasi-feudal social structure of rural Scotland. Like so many other representations of Scotland and the Scots they are culturally reactionary as well in offering



... and *Rockets Galore*



for endorsement and 'identification' a range of figures and situations which offer no guidance to the solution of the problems of the modern world which some of the films themselves pose. They have, in addition, had a limiting effect on a whole generation of Scottish players only the more outstanding of whom have been able to break free of this pernicious inheritance and function within other cinematic traditions.

There have been a limited number of attempts to make feature-length fiction films representing Scotland and the Scots from a stand-



'A cruelly stunting effect on a whole generation of Scottish players'. Duncan Macrae and Ronnie Corbett in *Rockets Galore*



point more appropriate to the 20th century. One such attempt, *The Gorbals Story* (1950), is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume. It is appropriate that another of these attempts to construct Scotland within a discourse other than Tartanry/Kailyard, *Floodtide* (1949), should have been based on a novel, and co-written, by the harshest Scottish critic of Kailyard, George Blake. In his book *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (1951) he writes:

. . . what impression of Scottish life and character have non-Scottish readers got from the Scottish novelists? The various answers to this question are all surprising and mostly fantastic. Most people know that modern, workaday Scotland is as far from being a paradise for clansmen in kilts, with heather trimmings and stags at eve, as it is from being a pantomime land of comedians, in which haggis, haddocks, bagpipes, whisky and an ill-tempered God affect in their various ways the souls of its pawky inhabitants. The daily newspaper reading of the most self-centred Cockney should have convinced him by now that Scotland is, in its most urgent aspect, a highly industrialised country, a sort of British Ruhr, with a great productivity of 'heavy' goods – coal, ships, steel – square mile upon square mile of slum, a passionate public interest in professional football and in the hazards of distant English racecourses, a lot of dog-racing tracks, and a rapidly decreasing respect for the authority of the Parish



Looking at the Clyde: Gordon Jackson and Rona Anderson in *Floodtide*



Minister. The fact is that the Industrial Revolution knocked the old Scotland sideways, with a violence in both the process and the consequences un-examined. A strange series of historical accidents brought it about that a certain amount of native genius, and certain natural supplies of raw materials, turned the Clyde Valley almost overnight into a Black Country.

Almost inevitably, therefore, *Floodtide* seeks to define the meaning of Scotland in relation to the Clyde. The impulse behind this was extremely progressive – *Floodtide* opens with a dedication to Clydeside workers – and it must always be recalled how ordinary Glaswegians were thrilled at the time of the film's release to see their own milieu up there on the screen (Imagine! *Barrowland!*), to see aspects of their own lives depicted and to hear for the first time the cadences of Glasgow speech coming from the sound system of a public cinema. This dimension of the film – and it is perhaps the aspect which wears best – is carried primarily in the figure of Tim Brogan, played by Jimmy Logan, a popular Glasgow music hall comic. This image of the Clyde as the bustling nerve-centre of a modern nation was to beckon successive generations of Scottish film-makers with progressive instincts. The problem consistently has been the ideological framework within which the Clyde has been perceived – the celebration of its people rather than the analysis of their situation – and the formal means of representation, in later decades Griersonian documentary and in the case of *Floodtide* classical realist narrative. These are not, in the last analysis, separate questions, for it is precisely the form of classical realist narrative which allows for the shaping of stories about individual psychology and interpersonal relationships and is conducive to a celebratory, mythicising tone. At the same time it inhibits the entry of more analytic concepts and discourses and is not conducive to a reflective tone. However, the two sides of the problem are analytically separable.

Following through the ideological dimension first, the film opens with an attempt to appropriate the meaning of the Clyde from one discourse to another, from country to city, from farming to shipbuilding. The opening frames of the narrative might indeed have come from a Tartanry/Kailyard film with a cart rolling towards a rustic cottage set in the hills on the Firth of Clyde. But very quickly oppositions are set up: the central figure, David Shields (Gordon Jackson), encouraged by his uncle who is a foreman in the shipyard, wants to build ships while his father wants him to remain and farm the land. The father is associated with all the regressive discourses George Blake traduces: 'There's been a Shields in Glentoran since the time of Bonnie Prince Charlie' and '[the city is] a Sodom and Gomorrah, all noise and hammers and temptation.' However, the uncle (being a freemason and therefore adept at ideological manoeuvre) manages to conflate the apparently incompati-



ble discourses ('The sea's as old as the hills and a good ship's as wonderful a work of God as a blackface ewe . . .') and secure David's move to the Glasgow shipyard. Although the film does, of course, show shipbuilding as a socio-economic process, its celebratory tone seeks to raise Clyde shipbuilding to a mystical level as evidence of the worth of the men who make the ships. This is done mainly by the central device by which classical narrative cinema signifies mystical possession: the look. Throughout the film there are scenes in which David stands with a faraway look in his eyes and contemplates the Clyde, a half-built hull, or a model ship in a glass case in the Kelvingrove Museum. From time to time also the shipyard workers are presented in ways reminiscent of the stakhanovite art of the Soviet Union, primarily through the framing of the figures. This is particularly marked in the scene of the final launching.

Progressive though *Floodtide's* impulses are, its perspective on the process of shipbuilding is consensualist – everyone from the Chairman of the company to the workers on the shopfloor is pulling together for the greater glory of shipbuilding and the Clyde. The shallowness of this dimension of the film has been bitterly exposed by history. In order to function mystically and consensually, two discourses prevalent in the actuality of the Clyde had to be evacuated from the text of the film – the class discourse and the sectarian discourse. The latter surfaces very



Signalling David's change of class: Gordon Jackson and Jimmy Logan in *Floodtide*



briefly in the disclosure that David's uncle is going to a 'lodge meeting'. But for the film to have pursued this further into the structure of power conferred in the yard – particularly at foreman level – by organised sectarian allegiance, would have opened fissures which would have cracked the mystical consensuality apart.

The discourse of class – and specifically its being set in motion then being repressed and evacuated – is more interesting in *Floodtide* and is perhaps best discussed in the context of the other problematic aspect of the film: its seeking to be progressive within the framework of classical realist narrative. The master structure of this narrative form – stability, disruption, restoration of new stability – and the attendant features of conflict, apparent resolution, reversal and final resolution, are carried both in David's progress from the shopfloor to the drawing office and in his progress from the girl he meets at Barrowland to his union with the shipyard boss's daughter. Both of these movements fit easily within the form of classical realist narrative as practised up till that time. However, these developments are so nakedly class-based that they seriously trouble this ostensibly progressive film, which then has to find ways of masking their implications. It is interesting to see the film struggling with itself in this regard. It is clear that it is much more sympathetic to the jovial, bantering milieu of Mrs McTavish's house, where David originally has lodgings with Tim, than to the tight-lipped, petit-bourgeois milieu of Mrs McCrae's house, where David is required to lodge after he leaves the shop floor and enters the drawing office. Similarly, the film lights on the absurdity of his having to wear a bowler hat in his new elevated job. However, to have pursued this awareness would have threatened the ideological project of the film – to valorise the men of the Clyde irrespective of class. The class tensions are dissolved in the ideology of the film in which it is made clear that David, though on the way up, 'doesn't forget his friends'. It is in order to clear the decks for David to marry the boss's daughter that the film has to do the greatest violence to the psychological realism of the classical narrative form. In order to reactivate the drama and the reversals demanded by that form, the working-class girl, Judy, having vanished from the action, is reintroduced in order to trouble David's relationship with the boss's daughter. Earlier in the film she had been constructed as a warm-hearted girl who makes the running in the relationship with David but later in the film, to mask the class basis of David's rejection of her, she is constructed as a slatternly virago who goes for the boss's daughter with a broken bottle, in Tim Brogan's phrase 'a right bad yin'. The final ideological leap of *Floodtide* is to contrive a separation between David and the boss's daughter so that they can be reunited, on the day of the launching of the first ship he has designed, on a hill overlooking the Firth. In this final scene the Clyde is made to function in two discourses simultaneously: the Scotland of beautiful hills and lochs and the



Scotland of dynamic industrial activity. *Floodtide*, with the best of intentions, deploys inadequate ideological and formal strategies for dealing with the material reality of Scottish industrial life. This is a failure which will be recapitulated when indigenous Scots film-makers come to grapple with the same problem.



Boss's daughter confronts Barrowland girl in *Floodtide*: Elizabeth Sellars, Jimmy Logan and Rona Anderson



Another progressive attempt to deal with the perceived reality of Scottish experience is *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952), one of the films made by Group 8 (see note on p.80), John Grierson's venture into feature film production. There is a considerable degree of pleasure, given the dire history of the representation of Scotland and the Scots in the cinema, to see an almost exclusively Scottish cast deployed on the screen to signify impulses other than 'Scottishness', whether of the Romantic or Kailyard variety. Indeed, it is a poignant experience to watch *The Brave Don't Cry* from a distance of thirty years and witness Scots actors functioning with great sensitivity and restraint within the tradition of European naturalism. In succeeding years these same actors were to be denied the cinematic conditions within which to display these qualities through being forced to function within the discourse of Kailyard and in production structures fashioned outside Scotland. The case of Jameson Clark well illustrates this point. Known to cinematic posterity primarily as the head-scratching comic highland policeman of modern Kailyard exercises such as *Whisky Galore* and *Rockets Galore*, Clark as the mine doctor in *The Brave Don't Cry* delivers the kind of controlled and subtle performance which, up to that point, had never been seen in the cinematic signifying of Scotland. *The Brave Don't Cry*, then, operates within the tradition of classic naturalistic narrative cinema of a relatively homogeneous kind; for instance, it does not



'The tradition of European naturalism': *The Brave Don't Cry*



display the bizarre but interesting mix of documentary naturalism and family melodrama of *Mandy* (1952), a film close to it in time.

This is not to say, however, that it is a wholly coherent and discursively trouble-free film. The locus of the film's problems is the figure of John Gregson. At one level, both in the role he plays and in his status as an actor in the British cinema of the fifties, Gregson represents the traces in the film text of an absent discourse which nevertheless troubles and deforms the film. It is no secret, as Forsyth Hardy indicates, that relationships between Group 3 and the British commercial film industry were less than cordial, the Group constantly having to negotiate the form of its projects in relation to the real or perceived demands of that industry. Gregson's presence – he was then a rising star of the Rank Organisation and was specifically imported on loan from Rank for commercial reasons – troubles the film deeply. This is evident in the violence his entry visits on the form of the narrative. Gregson enters late and without satisfactory explanation and the overall psychological realism of the film is ruptured by having him voluntarily join the trapped miners and occupy the dramatic centre of their struggle to get free from the mine. The Gregson figure is also the site of another disturbance in the film, this time an ideological one. Given the film's ideological project of celebrating the courage and dignity of the miners, issues of ownership, control and management of the mine – key questions, it might be thought, in the presentation of a mine disaster – are virtually repressed. But the introduction of the Gregson figure (he is a member of management) reactivates this issue only to collapse it within the humanistic and 'classless' project of the film. This is a problem which will reappear in Grierson's later, documentary-based projects in Scotland and is, indeed, the besetting problem of ostensibly politically progressive attempts to deal with Scottish life.

Elsewhere in this volume Forsyth Hardy argues spiritedly and lucidly on behalf of the achievement of Films of Scotland, for two decades after its formation in 1955 the almost exclusive channel through which indigenous Scottish film production flowed and the determining structure on the practice of several generations of Scottish film-makers. The conjuncture within which Films of Scotland emerged is spelled out by Forsyth Hardy: the key elements being the withdrawal of government money for civil service-based film production in Scotland; the presence of a well-connected and energetic ex-civil servant (Hardy himself) whose own cultural formation was strongly determined by Griersonian documentary; and the entrée to commercial cinema screens facilitated by Sir Alexander King, the Chairman of Films of Scotland. There is no reason whatsoever to dissent from Forsyth Hardy's conclusion that Films of Scotland's remit 'to project the life and achievement of Scotland' was reasonably carried out over the twenty years and one hundred and fifty films of his tenure as Director, and indeed in the years succeeding.



However, if the argument proceeds from different premisses Films of Scotland can be shown to have given, in many of its films, new and monstrous life to the regressive discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard; to have encouraged alternatives to these discourses which were politically inappropriate; and, by its hegemony in Scottish film production, to have pre-empted the emergence of alternative production structures which might have dealt more adequately with Scottish history, politics and contemporary life. Some of the questions which require to be posed are: to what extent the very remit of projecting life and achievement implied a political and aesthetic practice which eschewed the problematic and the contradictory in favour of the celebratory and, indeed, the incantatory; to what extent the making of films under the sponsorship of powerful establishment bodies such as business concerns, banks and the National Trust confirmed these tendencies and propelled Scottish film-makers headlong into the gaping jaws of Tartanry and Kailyard; and to what extent the dominance of the documentary stance inhibited the growth of an indigenous cinema of fictive discourses. The answers to these questions are by no means straightforward nor should the questions be laid wholly and exclusively at the door of Films of Scotland. The policies, public profiles and levels of activity of other film cultural agencies in Scotland (e.g. the Scottish Film Council, the Scottish Arts Council and the Scottish Federation of Film Societies) are part of the picture too. However, Films of Scotland's long-term dominance over film-making in Scotland makes it appropriate that these questions be directed there first.

The evidence on which judgments can be made (virtually the total output of Films of Scotland) is to be found in the Scottish Central Film Library in Glasgow. A complete analysis would involve a massive research task which this essay cannot encompass, but it is reasonable to pose about this body of films the question with which this essay has been centrally concerned; what discourses have informed representations of Scotland and the Scots on the screen? Given the awesome power and international omnipresence of Tartanry and Kailyard, it is scarcely surprising that much of the output of Films of Scotland should be deeply marked by them. Put another way, the hegemonic discourses about Scotland within which Scots, including Scottish film-makers, are interpellated, are set in place as social actors, provide a severely limited set of representations of the country and its people. It is not an issue of the talent or lack of it of Scottish film-makers; pound for pound they are no better or worse than those of any other country. But they have two particular disabilities: the dominant filmic representations of their country have been articulated elsewhere, and the indigenous Scottish institutions which exist to foster film culture have never articulated as a priority the helping of Scottish film-makers towards the discourses which would effectively counter the dominant ones. Put another way,



these institutions have never attempted to analyse the problem of Scottish culture and construct film policies to help remedy this problem. The encouragement of individual talent in film-making and the celebration of individual films are poor substitutes for such policies.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find the Tartan Monster (the phrase is Tom Nairn's) stalking the pages of the Films of Scotland catalogue. Some of the very titles chill the spine: *A Song for Prince Charlie* (1958); *By Lochaber I Will Go* (1960); *Edinburgh Tattoo* (1972); *The Black Watch* (1971); *Come Away In* (1974); *The Tartans of Scotland* (1966); *Cock O' The North* (1972); *A Touch of Scotland* (1964). These and many more give free passage to, take absolutely no critical distance from, Tartanry and Kailyard.

From among these films it would be possible to construct, Frankenstein monster-like, the Ur-Tartan Documentary. It would open, accompanied by a clarsach or plaintive Scottish violin tune, on a panorama of lochs and bens, preferably in autumn since the lament is the dominant tone of the form. Against this Landseerian background (the more gross versions actually include a kilted and claymored highlander) the commentary begins to unfold. The choice of narrator is crucial: the voice must call up the cluster of motifs characteristic of the genre: beauty, sadness, dignity, loss. Such a voice is that of Duncan Macintyre, a frequent narrator in Films of Scotland productions, with a voice reminiscent of the late Duncan Macrae in one of his highland roles. The visual, verbal and musical rhetorics are sustained throughout with a frequent closure on a loch at sunset (one notorious film closes with clinking glasses of a Scottish liqueur held, in be-laced hands, against the sky). The following extracts from the actual commentaries of such films indicate both the subject matter and tone of the genre: 'in the dance Scottish soldiers find a way of expressing their joy and pride in their calling and their country'; 'in Skye the past has a habit of coming alive now'; '[the battlefield of Culloden] moves the Scottish heart today as much as it did Rabbie Burns'; 'Honour the name of it: drink to the fame of it — the tartan!'; 'the honour, the glory, and the romance of the Scots'; 'love of his native land and its romantic tradition'; 'with a kind of inward joy he looked on the Eildon Hills. He had indeed come home'; '[on] that battleground of dreadful memory . . . the sorrow of defeat is here recorded'; '[the statue of Flora Macdonald] searching in vain for the lost Jacobite cause'; 'here, on the edge of the Atlantic, everything seems to stand still'; 'Soon more clansmen came; a trickle, a tumble, a cataract'; 'Scottish hearts were high as the young prince marched through the Lowlands'; 'the River Esk ran with blood and the English soldiers scattered like sheep'.

Dire as this dimension of its output is, Films of Scotland is not monolithic. Other discourses about Scotland are evident. Indeed, as Forsyth Hardy makes clear, both he and Grierson were extremely



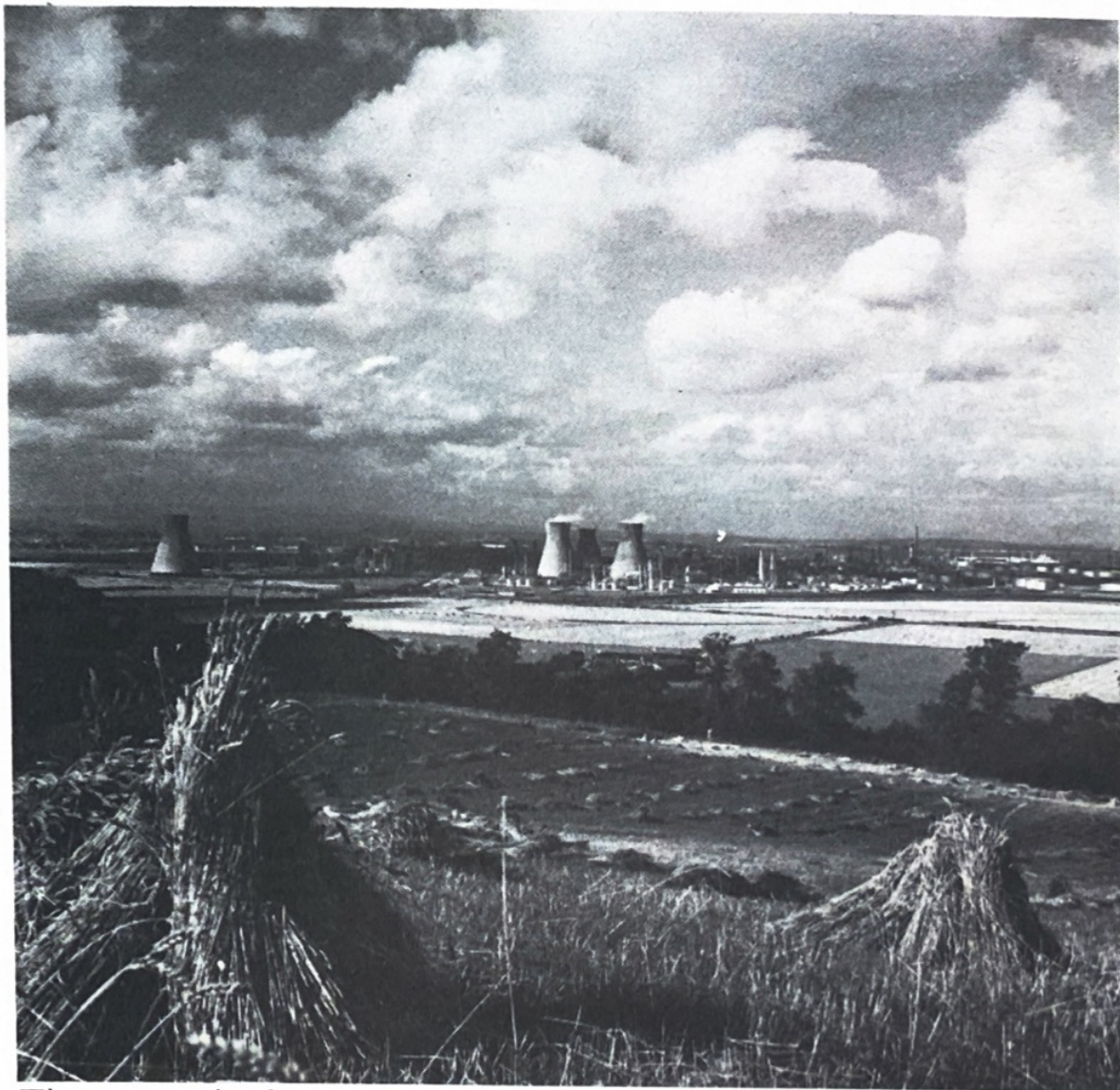
critical of Tartanry/Kailyard and throughout their careers sought to create representations of Scotland and the Scots more in keeping with the contemporary world. The discourse which emerged from this impulse constructed Scotland as a bustling, thrusting, modern industrial nation and its people, rural as well as urban, not as hopeless dreamers crying into their whisky over the failure of the '45, but as strong, practical souls drawing strength from the land and from the past, but more than able to cope with the affairs of the modern world.

Such is the power of traditions of representation over the impulses of individual film-makers that many Scottish film-makers, including some of the most talented, oscillate between the available discourses according to the projects they are working on at the time. But the best work of some of the more talented is to be found within the discourse associated with Grierson and Hardy. This 'Scotland on the Move' discourse first emerged in the brief Films of Scotland venture of 1938 which Forsyth Hardy describes. It can be illustrated with reference to *They Made the Land* (1938). Although the film is about Scotland, its stylistic points of reference are the British documentary films of the thirties and the Soviet cinema of the twenties. It is frankly instructional, concerned with the details of processes such as draining peat bogs; but in common with British documentary films of the time, it displays its interest in 'poetry' in the rhetoric of its images and its commentary. When the narration refers to the 'strong, handsome women' who helped work the land, the camera frames them from below and against the sky in the manner of Soviet cinema. Similarly, the clipped, Anglicised commentary – there were no Scottish production units operating in this form of cinema in the thirties – refers to Scottish trees having 'strong roots defying the tempest' and frequently deploys the rhetorical trope of repetition which sets it apart from the more literal forms of documentary: 'the wind blew over the crops in the new-laid fields . . . the wind blew over the crops and knocked them down . . .' With the re-emergence of Films of Scotland in 1955, this 'Scotland on the Move' discourse loomed very large indeed and is to be found in many of the titles in the Films of Scotland catalogue: e.g. *The Tay Road Bridge* (1967); *From Glasgow Green to Bendigo* (1958) – about Templeton's carpets; *Livingston: A Town for the Lothians* (1970); *County on the Move* (1960); *Cumbernauld: Town for Tomorrow* (1971); and *Seawards The Great Ships* (1959). It was this discourse which received Grierson's personal imprimatur (he wrote the treatments for several of the films constructed within it) and which attracted some of the most talented of the indigenous Scottish film-makers.

It is convenient to discuss the modern version of this discourse in relation to the work of two such film-makers, Laurence Henson and Eddie McConnell, because their work demonstrates both its possibilities and also its limitations. When they work together Henson usually directs and



McConnell acts as cinematographer but McConnell is a film-maker in his own right in which role (e.g. *A Kind of Seeing* (1967) and *Raindrop* (1975)) he seems strongly drawn to formalism and pictorialism. Indeed, *A Kind of Seeing* illustrates objectively that traditions of representation – in this case of the Scottish landscape – can have an overwhelming, a deformative effect on even the strongest talent and pull the work into the maw of Tartanry. The joint work of Henson and McConnell is best illustrated by *The Big Mill* (1963) and *Heart of Scotland* (1961). The latter, from a treatment by John Grierson, is about the Carse of Stirling and offers a sophisticated and well-achieved example of the 'Scotland on the Move' discourse. In many respects the work of Henson and McConnell is the apotheosis of Griersonianism with its bringing 'beauty' to bear on socio-economic processes. Introducing one of their films on television, Grierson said: 'documentary suggests public reports and social problems. I see it as a visual art which can convey a sense of beauty above the ordinary world.' *Heart Of Scotland* moves across the Carse



The present in the past in *Heart of Scotland*



of Stirling and seeks to weld together elements as disparate as the battlefield of Bannockburn and the oil refinery at Grangemouth. It achieves this through a rhetoric of poeticisation and abstraction which is carried in the rich visual style, the 'literary' commentary and the modern, abstract music. The continuity it seeks to make between the past and the present is essentially a mystical one of strength passing from the land to the people and to modern, industrial processes. The achievements of this discourse – particularly in the hands of Henson and McConnell – are evident enough: great pictorial beauty and a sense of social continuity and unity. Its principal limitation is equally evident: a failure to accommodate analysis and contradiction.



Gigantism in *Seawards The Great Ships*



That failure is more historically apparent in another Films of Scotland film based on a treatment by John Grierson: *Seawards The Great Ships*. The mythicising of the processes and personnel of the Clyde shipyards, the elementalism and gigantism of the visual and verbal imagery ('mighty', 'titanic', 'the welder is king', 'rigidity that will withstand pounding oceans') – reminiscent of the stakhanovite art of the Soviet Union – seem shabby and hollow in the light of what has become of the Upper Clyde. Starkly in retrospect, the breast-beating and tub-thumping of *Seawards The Great Ships* offers no comfort to Clydeside workers or guidance as to the historical processes which have put them out of work. That is the central failure of the Griersonian/'Scotland on the Move' discourse.

Tartanry/Kailyard and 'Scotland on the Move' in Films of Scotland films operate relatively independently of each other with occasional transitions from one to another in particular films – 'We are a people with traditions, but . . . ' While most Scots can see right through the empty posturings of Tartanry and Kailyard, the absence of a tough, popularly-based and analytic cinematic tradition has meant that the 'Scotland on the Move' discourse has largely filled the vacuum, especially for the left. However, at its most pernicious – as in *Seawards the Great Ships* – it simply replaces the older discourses as the cue which sets the tartan snake uncoiling in the stomach.

A tiny minority of the Films of Scotland canon constitute, far and away, the most interesting films which have emerged under its auspices. These are the films which do not allow free passage to the discourses of Tartanry/Kailyard and 'Scotland on the Move' but which turn them back on themselves, render them problematic, subvert them. Three films are of particular interest: *The Caledonian Account* (1976)<sup>4</sup> by Douglas Eadie and Brian Crumlish, and *Mackintosh* (1968) and *Clydescope* (1974) by Murray Grigor.

*The Caledonian Account*, on the face of it, sets up a range of expectations as horrendous as those of the Ur-Tartan Documentary. Sponsored by a cruise company, its action is a sail down the Caledonian Canal and part of its interest is that it delivers on these expectations. However, the audience is set back on its heels to learn that the passengers on this cruise are Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Telford, the builder of the Caledonian Canal. A rubric at the beginning of the film sets up the practicality/romanticizing opposition which will be played out between the two in the course of the film, as each seeks to impose his construction of Scotland on the other. This is signalled in the opening shot of the film as Sir Walter rides towards the camera mouthing:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself has said  
This is my own, my native land?



The two proceed to construct passing features within their separate discourses. Thus a mill which for Telford provides work for the populace becomes, for Scott, his own private Loch Ness monster; the owner of Glengarry Castle is, for Scott, the jewel among the highland chiefs who welcomed George IV to Edinburgh in 1822 and, for Telford, the man who resisted the building of the canal; and a forestry commission grove represents, for Telford, the putting back of something into an exploited landscape while, for Scott, it means the end of wildness and the beginning of regimentation. The film ends on a shot of the cruise vessel, ironically *The Jacobite*, apparently in an idyllic highland scene. The camera pulls back to reveal an industrial plant in the foreground.

The choice of *Mackintosh* as a subject by Murray Grigor is a polemical statement in itself. More than any other Scottish film-maker, Grigor has sought consciously to interrogate the cultural inheritance which Scotland offers and to bring to that inheritance a modernist sensibility which stresses play, paradox and contradiction. This he has done in work on Scottish themes made outside Scotland (e.g. his film on Hugh MacDiarmid for Granada Television); in the exhibition he mounted with his wife, Barbara, *Scotch Myths* (1981), which was, in itself, a massive exposure and deconstruction of Tartanry/Kailyard; and in the work he did as Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival (he is one of the few Scottish film-makers to have shown an interest in film history, criticism and theory), where he was responsible for the extension of the Festival's main concern with documentary towards more stylized, fictive discourses, particularly those of Hollywood. Important also, in this context, was his inauguration at the Festival of an explicitly critical event and a publication which, in succeeding years, were to become key sites for the introduction of new ideas about the cinema not only to Scotland but to the whole of the UK. The cool, elegant *Mackintosh* is part *hommage* to a kindred artist, part exploration of the dialectic between tradition and modernism at the centre of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's work.

It is entirely appropriate that Grigor should have worked on two occasions with Billy Connolly, the Glasgow comic who has the capacity (as yet unrealized) to be a major subversive, and therefore progressive, force in Scottish cultural life. One of these occasions was the making of a Films of Scotland film, *Clydescope* (there is a strong Joycean flavour in everything Grigor does, but particularly in the titles of his projects). *Clydescope*, as a project, is a veritable field of elephant traps for a Scottish artist. Sponsored by the Clyde Tourist Association, it follows Connolly on a trip from the upper reaches of the Clyde down through Glasgow to Loch Lomond and the Clyde Coast. The major elephant trap (the one with the spikes at the bottom) is the Ur-Tartan Documentary within which the scenic beauty and the couthy folk of the Clyde



might have been celebrated. *Clydescope* dodges this, and most of the other traps, neatly: indeed, on occasion fills them in. Far from the confident certainty of the Ur-Tartan Documentary's discourse, *Clydescope* begins with a series of puzzles and paradoxes. Connolly is stopped in the upper reaches of the Clyde by a passing motorist looking for 'Egypt'. The puzzled Connolly confesses to knowing of a Moscow in the area, but not of an Egypt (the apparent obscurity of this joke is cashed later in the film by the discovery of Alexandria on Loch Lomond side). The sense of paradox of the opening is continued in the discovery that the source of the Clyde contains 'little towns with names like Biggar' and the landmark the film chooses to foreground is not a 'view' but the Metropolitan Photographic Studio, a site where changes of personality and historical role might be purchased (indicated by Connolly's getting done up in Victorian army uniform).

In *Clydescope* Glasgow can be introduced by a coat of arms designed in the style of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a sail down the Clyde can be merry and celebratory without being maudlin and the Tartanry and stakhanovite views of the Clyde are eschewed for the formally complex imagery of the Edwardian glasswork of the roof of Wemyss Bay station. However, *Clydescope's coup de grace* to the discourse of Tartanry is to take on and defeat Loch Lomond. This shrine of Tartanry (and Kailyard) represented on scores of unspeakable postcards, shortbread tins and table mats, and celebrated in popular song and in the Ur-Tartan Documentary, is represented in *Clydescope* by a bear-garden on its shore while, on the soundtrack, the song 'Loch Lomond' is sonorously played on what sounds like a ship's foghorn as *The Maid of the Loch* cruises in frame.

In considering the Films of Scotland corpus, it remains to assess its major intervention in the field of narrative fiction, *The Duna Bull* (1971). The motives which Forsyth Hardy outlines are admirable, to extend the experience of Scots film-makers into forms previously denied them in the Scottish context (although a few had had such experience elsewhere through bodies like the Children's Film Foundation). A recurrent argument of this essay is that where powerful existing traditions of representation, or discourses, exist (as is the case with Scotland) even talented artists will find it extremely difficult to create representations outside the frameworks of these traditions. This is writ large with regard to *The Duna Bull* (despite its being a Henson/McConnell film). An account of its story-line immediately begins to ring bells regarding the discourse within which it has been constructed. Duna, a remote Hebridean island, loses its only bull and applies for another to the Department of Agriculture (the film's sponsor) in Edinburgh. An initially hostile young official sent to investigate the request is won over by the strength of the case and the charms of the local schoolteacher. The discursive antecedents of *The Duna Bull* are, quite evidently, films like



*Laxdale Hall*, *The Maggie*, *Whisky Galore* and *Rockets Galore* – the modern Kailyard discourse – in which canny and couthy highlanders get the better of (in this case win over) uncomprehending or hostile (usually bureaucratic) forces from outside. This is confirmed in the casting and playing of the film and in its *mise en scène* (for instance, comic music pointing up responses in particular scenes). From this point of view, *The Duna Bull* advances Scottish film culture not one whit.

As this essay is being written a newspaper announces that Bill Forsyth's next project will be a big-budget, international film. One's spirits rise: here is a gifted Scottish film-maker whose two feature films, *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) and *Gregory's Girl* (1980), have decidedly eschewed Tartanry/Kailyard and deployed discourses which are not maudlin but which relate to aspects of the lived experience of contemporary Scots. However, as one reads on a cold chill begins to come over the heart: the story will be set in the Highlands; it will be about the impact of off-shore oil; and Burt Lancaster will play the president of a multinational oil company. One tries to blot out memories of *The Maggie*, but they will not go away. As the elephant traps begin to open, it is fervently hoped that Bill Forsyth can sidestep them.

This essay has argued that the discourses within which Scotland and the Scots have been represented in films have been wholly inadequate for dealing with the historical and contemporary reality of Scotland. Some of these filmic discourses – for example the Tartanry of *Bonnie Prince Charlie* or *Rob Roy: The Highland Rogue* and the Kailyardry of *The Little Minister* or *Whisky Galore* – Scots film-makers have been powerless to oppose, since they were deployed within production structures fashioned outside Scotland. Nevertheless, they had a pernicious two-fold effect. On the one hand, they defined the cinematic terrain within which several generations of Scots actors could function, setting a limited range of roles and foregrounding particular modes of acting. This has had a cruelly stunting effect on Scots actors which, in terms of the growth of individual talents, could only be remedied by working outside Scotland and within different, non-Scottish discourses. The second pernicious effect of the dominance of Tartanry/Kailyard is that, when indigenous Scots film-makers came to make their own films, these powerful existing traditions of representation beckoned them Circe-like and lured more than a few onto the rocks. However, even when indigenous Scots film-makers were able to produce a discourse which sloughed off Tartanry/Kailyard and attempted to come to grips with the reality of contemporary Scotland – as was the case with the adaptation of the Griersonian impulse, the 'Scotland on the Move' discourse – it allowed talents to develop and produced formally attractive works, but proved hopelessly inadequate for dealing both with the meaning of Scottish history and the complex socio-political condition of contemporary Scotland (see the earlier remarks on *Seawards The Great Ships*).



Clearly some blame for this must lie with Scots film-makers themselves. With very few exceptions they have shown little interest in equipping themselves politically and artistically for the stern tasks to hand. The annual gathering of Scots film-makers, Film Bang, for instance, has never addressed these problems nor come remotely close to the formulation of collective socio-aesthetic statements such as film-makers produced in the Soviet Union of the twenties, in post-war Italy and even in England in the thirties. Rather Film Bang has seemed like a recurrent peevish cry for the resources which would lift the film-makers, as individuals, into the stratosphere of international film production.

However, the Scottish failure has not been one primarily of individual will; it has been the failure of institutions to create the conditions for the development of more politically and artistically relevant discourses. Put epigrammatically, institutions like the Scottish Film Council, the Scottish Federation of Film Societies, Films of Scotland and, more recently, the Scottish Arts Council, have failed to keep a historic appointment with the discourses of marxism and modernism, the conjunction which has dynamized analogous institutions in other cultures. The single Scottish institution which to any degree has made this engagement, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, is the only one with any reputation in international film culture. Some of the reasons for this failure can be gleaned from Forsyth Hardy's account of the historical origins of (some of) these bodies elsewhere in this volume.

Needless to say, the call for a Scottish institutional engagement with the discourses of marxism and modernism is not a plea that the institutions swallow these discourses whole and periodically regurgitate them: that would not only be intellectually deadening, but would be a wholly inappropriate role for publicly-funded bodies in a pluralist society. Such bodies must have due regard for the diversity of views in the constituencies they serve, while at the same time ensuring that processes of debate and renewal occur. There is little evidence of these processes in Scottish film culture. Just as it was appropriate to raise the question of the adequacy of indigenous Scottish film production in the first instance with Films of Scotland, so too is it appropriate to raise matters concerning the general health of Scottish film culture with the Scottish Film Council – the body charged with its encouragement in Scotland. The institutional failure to engage critically with recent thinking about the cinema and society has meant that Scotland has produced no equivalents of Syberberg's, Bertolucci's, Angelopoulos', Alvarez's and Mulloy's treatments of their respective national histories; no equivalents of Godard's, Oshima's or Makavejev's anatomizing of the sexual mores of the societies in which they live; no equivalents of the sustained reflection on the processes of cinema evident in the work of Snow and Straub/Huillet; and – perhaps most damagingly of all – no equivalents of the accounts of women's experience to be found in the



work of Akerman, Rainer and Wollen/Mulvey.

That is the extent of the institutional failure of Scottish film culture.

## Notes

1. Before readers start reaching for their guns at what might seem wilful linguistic exoticism on my part, let me openly discuss a problem posed in the writing of this essay. Re-reading the draft, I recoiled at the heavy recurrence of the word 'discourse' and its affiliates (e.g. 'discursive antecedents') and started scratching out these words and finding substitutes. That is, half-consciously on my part, the literary ideology of 'good style' – that cluster of practices (such as not repeating the same word too often) designed to produce the illusion of effortlessness, elegance and force in the writing and ease in the reading – came into play. Readers will no doubt perceive the traces of this ideology remaining in the text, but – quite apart from the important principle of resisting the idea of the transparency of language – I felt it necessary to resist the impulse to continue excising the word 'discourse' because of its centrality as a concept in the essay.

2 This is best illustrated in relation to the decision to favour 'discursive positions' over 'stereotypes' (although the same argument could be deployed with regard to the essay's recurrent use of the word 'construct'). 'Stereotype' tends to get used only with regard to one aspect of the production of fictions, the construction of character. It immediately sets up a comparison between the character as constructed in the fiction and people in the 'real' world on a one-to-one basis. For instance, it is often argued that certain races or genders are presented 'stereotypically' and that the problem is easily dealt with by presenting them 'realistically', the underlying assumption being that the fictions of the cinema or television or literature 'reflect' or 'capture' the world as perceived by the senses in a direct, unmediated way. To choose the phrase 'discursive positions' over 'stereotypes' is to reject this whole conception of the relationship between fictions and the 'real' world. To describe a character in a fiction as a 'discursive position' is to suggest that 'his/her' development and movement are determined not primarily by reference to the world outside the fiction but to the organizing discourses within which the fiction is constructed – this is the classic *structuralist* position. For instance, it is argued in this essay that the actions of one of the characters in *Floodtide* are determined by the needs of two of the key shaping discourses of the film (the formal discourse of classical narrative and the ideological discourse of masking the class basis of the hero's choices) rather than by questions of how the character would behave in 'real' life. This factor alone – the insistence that all the elements of the fiction are part of a system and cannot be referred piecemeal to the 'real' world outside the fiction – would be grounds enough for preferring 'discursive positions' to 'stereotypes', but to remain at this point would be *formalist*, would give no indication of the function of the fiction in the 'real' world. The essay poses the view that the objective function of fictions is to set audiences in place with regard to the 'real' world; to construct ways of looking at the world so that it appears natural and unproblematic from those points of view. What the essay is about, therefore, is how a certain



limited number of discourses have been deployed in the cinema to construct Scotland and the Scots and to give the impression that no other constructions are possible.

2. See M. Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture*: London, 1978.

3. This indication of the kind of role assigned women in Kailyardry (similar domestically-based roles are evident in Tartanry as well) raises the question of the strongly patriarchal nature of these discourses. This is not just a question of the representation of women on the screen, it is a feature of Scottish film culture as a whole (e.g. the dearth of women film-makers and of women prominently placed in indigenous film cultural institutions). The lack of a separate essay on this question in this book is perhaps a symptom of the very backwardness we seek to define.

4. Although *The Caledonian Account* bears all the marks of being a Films of Scotland film – it was sponsored by Jacobite Cruises and the Highlands and Islands Development Board – it is not technically such, having been produced independently of that organisation.



# 4 Scottish Film Culture: A Chronicle

JIM HICKEY

- 1929 Glasgow Film Society founded.
- 1930 Edinburgh Film Guild founded.
- 1932-5 *Cinema Quarterly*, an international film journal. Editor: Norman Wilson
- 1934 Scottish Film Council established, Glasgow.
- 1936 Scottish Federation of Film Societies founded.
- 1938 First Films of Scotland Committee founded, Edinburgh.
- 1939 Scottish Central Film Library established by SFC
- 1946 Edinburgh Film Guild moves to Hill Street premises.
- 1947 First Edinburgh International Film Festival, organised by Edinburgh Film Guild. Chairman: Norman Wilson. No Director, but an Advisory Committee including: Basil Wright, Charles Oakley, Paul Rotha and H. Forsyth Hardy.
- 1952 EIFF 'New Directions in Documentary' Conference.
- 1953 EIFF 'Television, Film & Reality' Conference.
- 1954 Films of Scotland Committee re-established. Chairman: Sir Alexander B. King. Director: H. Forsyth Hardy.  
EIFF 'The Film and Publicity' Conference.
- 1956 First Issue of *The Living Cinema*, an International Film Quarterly, published by Edinburgh Film Guild.
- 1957 Scottish Television begins transmission.  
EIFF Director: Callum Mill.
- 1958 Edinburgh Film Guild and EIFF move to Randolph Crescent premises. EIFF Director: Theo Lang.  
EIFF International Conference of Film-makers.
- 1959 EIFF Director: Donald M. Elliot.
- 1960 EIFF Director: R. B. Macluskie.
- 1961 Films of Scotland's *Seawards The Great Ships* awarded Oscar.  
EIFF Director: Michael Elder.  
Grampian Television begins transmission.
- 1963 EIFF 'What is a Television Film?' Conference.
- 1964 Films of Scotland's First Golden Thistle Award presented to King Vidor. Peter Watkins' *Culloden* for BBC TV.
- 1965 EIFF Director: David Bruce. Golden Thistle Award presented to Fred Zinnemann.



- 1966 First 'Scotland on the Screen' event organised by Films of Scotland.
- 1967 EIFF Director: Murray Grigor.  
Golden Thistle Award for Sir Carol Reed.
- 1968 Edinburgh Film Theatre opened as National Film Theatre (Edinburgh) Ltd.  
Golden Thistle Award to John Grierson.
- 1969 EIFF Publication *Sam Fuller* (ed. David Will and Peter Wollen).  
'Sam Fuller: The Complete Works', first major retrospective at EIFF.  
Edinburgh ABC becomes first triple cinema in Britain.
- 1970 EIFF Claude Chabrol and Monte Hellman Retrospectives.  
EIFF Publication *Roger Corman: The Millenic Vision*. (ed. David Will and Paul Willemen).  
Golden Thistle Award for Darryl Zanuck.
- 1971 Twenty-fifth EIFF. Bernardo Bertolucci and Norman McLaren Retrospectives. Stirling Film Theatre (part-time) opened.
- 1972 EIFF Douglas Sirk Retrospective and First Women's Film Festival.  
EIFF Publication *Douglas Sirk* (ed. Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday).
- 1973 EIFF Director: Lynda Myles.  
EIFF Frank Tashlin and Irvin Kershner Retrospectives.  
EIFF Publication *Frank Tashlin* (ed. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen).  
Kirkcaldy Film Theatre opened (part-time).
- 1974 Glasgow Film Theatre opened.  
EIFF Raoul Walsh Retrospective.  
EIFF Publication *Raoul Walsh* (ed. Phil Hardy).
- 1975 Scottish Council for Educational Technology established, incorporating Scottish Film Council.  
EIFF Brecht Event and Jacques Tourneur, Martin Scorsese Retrospectives.  
EIFF Publication *Jacques Tourneur* (ed. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen).  
Lawrence Knight: Director of Films of Scotland.
- 1976 Neil Paterson: Director of Films of Scotland.  
First Film Bang Event and publication of Film Bang directory.  
EIFF Psychoanalysis and Cinema Event and Publication of *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*. International Forum on Avant-Garde Film.  
First Edinburgh International Television Festival.  
Inverness Film Theatre opened (part-time).  
SFC creates Scottish Film Archive.
- 1977 EIFF 'History/Production/Memory' Event and Publication of *Edinburgh '77 Magazine*. Wim Wenders Retrospective.  
Irvine Film Theatre opened (part-time).



- SFC funds Cinema Sgìre (Western Isles mobile film and video unit).
- 1978** Conversion of Lothian Road church into Edinburgh's new Filmhouse begins. 90-seat auditorium completed.  
 EIFF Max Ophüls Retrospective and Perspective on British Avant-Garde.  
 Film Studies courses established at Universities of Stirling and Glasgow.  
 Jim Wilson: Director of Films of Scotland.  
 SFC Technicians' Training Scheme begins.
- 1979** EIFF Feminism & Cinema, Documentary 50 and New Philippino Cinema Events.  
 Bill Forsyth's *That Sinking Feeling*; World Première at EIFF.  
 Dundee Film Theatre opened (part-time).
- 1980** EIFF Joseph H. Lewis, John Mackenzie and National Film Archive Events.  
 Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl*; World Première at London Film Festival.  
 Scottish Arts Council Film and Video Production Fund established.
- 1981** EIFF Director: Jim Hickey.  
 EIFF Portuguese Cinema Event. Screening of *Napoleon* with live orchestra. Raul Ruiz Event and tribute to James Blue.
- 1982** New Filmhouse auditorium opened.  
 EIFF 'Scotch Reels' Event.  
 Films of Scotland Committee disbanded. Joint Scottish Film Council/Scottish Arts Council Production Fund established.



## 5 An Interview with Forsyth Hardy

### FILM JOURNALISM

*You began as a journalist and soon became film critic of The Scotsman. How did this come about?*

I'd had a short period on the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and did a lot of things there including the film column which was called Film Chat. It wasn't a very critical column, but it enabled me to see all the current films at that very interesting moment of the transition from silent to sound cinema. I can remember very vividly seeing *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and a film called *The Last Command* (1928), an American film with Emil Jannings, and several other films, some from Hungary, some from Scandinavia. When I returned to *The Scotsman* after a year it had no film column so I suggested to the editor, Sir George Waters, that *The Scotsman* ought to have one like some of the other papers. Caroline Lejeune was writing for *The Observer*, Sydney Carroll for *The Sunday Times*, Robert Herring for the, then, *Manchester Guardian*. There was a good anonymous column in the *Birmingham Post* and Ernest Dyer was writing a very good column in the Newcastle paper. Sir George agreed to it as an experiment and encouraged me to take a wide perspective on the cinema; therefore my remit from the beginning was to keep an eye on the whole area of the film and its impact on the public. Censorship at that time was a very keen issue, and all sorts of movements were beginning, like the film society movement, and the documentary film movement had already started.

*We very much respond to the polemical quality of your Scotsman pieces, the practice of arguing strongly for certain positions. Did you feel at the time that the options for film culture in Scotland were very open and that your column could significantly influence events?*

Yes. I hope I'm not flattering myself if I say that *The Scotsman* did have an influence on the developments taking place at that time and temperamentally and in terms of the developments I wished to see occur, I opted for a polemical style.

*That very quality of polemic meant that you devoted a lot of space to the discussion of broad policy questions (e.g. fiction v documentary) and institutions (the value of the British Film Institute and the Scottish Film Council) and consequently less space to the discussion of particular movies. Would that be a fair assessment?*

I think it's a fair assessment only up to a point, because when there was a



film of any consequence I did in fact devote the whole of the space that I had to it. Just to take one or two examples: Vidor's *Hallelujah* (1929) was striking out in new directions, and *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932), and then there were the French films which seemed to me to demand and merit more space than just a passing comment. But certainly the other question of arguing about institutions and changes – these were very much in the top of my mind. I think I probably honestly preferred to write about these than give a great deal of space to individual films.

*Our impression is that in broad terms you were concerned to argue the case for European cinema over British and American cinema and for documentary over fictional cinema. Were those indeed your priorities?* To take the first question first – the European cinema rather than Hollywood cinema – yes, I think that that was so, because I was getting more excitement out of the European films than out of the Hollywood films of the period. Not that I was unaware of them, because I was greatly interested in, for example, the whole of the gangster movie period and Chicago. But the foreign films, especially the French films of the thirties, seemed to me to carry values and virtues not to be found in the Hollywood and British films of the time. Also my readers were expecting to have that kind of film written about at length, and that probably pushed me towards that kind of writing in the column. The other question of the preference for documentaries: documentary was the growing thing during the whole of that time, and there was always something new happening, and many of my friends were in the documentary film movement. One was seeing their films: one wanted to help them as much as possible, like giving them exposure in the column, and one wanted to let a wider audience know of the existence of these films. Also, I think probably the documentary idea appealed to me more than the fictional idea at that time, and therefore any good documentary that came along was likelier to get exposure in *The Scotsman*, probably beyond its merit or beyond its justification.

*One often talks about the documentary attitude. Were you perhaps validating the documentary attitude rather than necessarily privileging 'factual' cinema over 'fictional'?*

Yes, I think that's true. I think that whenever there was a documentary element in a fictional film that was the kind of film I preferred to write about.

*In several of your pieces in the mid- to late thirties you engage very forcefully with the question of the representation of Scotland and the Scots on the screen. To quote you: 'More often than not the Scot has appeared as a ridiculous compound of toper and miser and his real character has gone unrecorded'; and, discussing the failure of the British organizing committee to include the 1938 Films of Scotland films in the programme for the New York World Fair, you write: 'It*



*seems that the films do not give the hackneyed, picturesque view of Scotland – the sort of thing that suggests that the Scots are bearded and kilted giants brandishing claymores on the hillsides, and chasing deer through the heather'. Specifically, what films were you attacking and what kinds of films were you implying should be made?*

One of the things I resented was that the Scot when he appeared in films made in London was often a kind of subsidiary comic figure, never a leading figure. And whenever he or she appeared in a film there was expected to be a kind of giggling reaction to the character. I can't think of any film where there was a respected Scot as a central character. I can remember writing about Hitchcock's *39 Steps* (1935) and being annoyed at the way Scottish life was portrayed.

*You obviously thought that the best way of getting round that problem was to opt for the documentary field.*

Yes, the group of films\* that were made for the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938: here was a group of films, made within eighteen months or so, that presented a very complete picture of Scotland that was utterly different from anything that had appeared before. And there was understandable fury when this picture, which included warts and all, was turned down by the British Council, who were responsible for the selection of films at the New York World Fair. The image was regarded as not presenting a sufficiently ceremonial or picturesque presentation of life in Britain, or the northern half of Britain in this case. There was a great deal of resentment about the Council's decision. It was felt that an opportunity of showing a more genuine image of Scotland wasn't being taken and therefore there was a feeling that the Scottish experience was not going to get across over there. They were not shown in the British pavilion at all, but Grierson, with his skill in persuading people to do things, managed to get the whole group accepted for an American social science pavilion. So the films were shown, but they weren't shown along with the films of *Trooping the Colour*, the *Royal Jewels* and all the other kind of nonsenses that were selected for the rest of the country.

*When you were writing your film journalism did you have a sense of being broadly sympathetic to the other kinds of film journalism being written at the time, or were you in reaction against them?*

I was influenced initially a good deal by Rotha's *The Film Till Now* (1930), but the critic who mainly influenced me at that time was Caroline Lejeune and I don't think today that her work is sufficiently appreciated. I think that for a very wide public during the thirties she influenced attitudes towards films and film-going more, probably, than any other critic, with the possible exception, later, of Dilys Powell. She had an enormous influence. Although she was never an open promoter

*\*Face of Scotland, Wealth of a Nation, They Made the Land, Scotland for Fitness, The Children's Story, Sea Food.*



of the film society movement, nevertheless what she wrote helped to feed its growth. Then there was Rudolph Arnheim and that curious publication *Close-Up* (1927-33). I don't remember reacting against any critical writing at that time. I remember being undoubtedly influenced by some of them.

#### CINEMA QUARTERLY

*What were the impulses behind the setting up of Cinema Quarterly (1932-5)?*

Here I would like to make sure that full credit is paid to Norman Wilson, who was the editor of *Cinema Quarterly*. He and I were very closely associated during the thirties and the forties as well. We felt that *Close-Up* was just a comic publication. It was a way-out, avant-garde thing which had no real relationship to the total development of movies. We wanted a publication that would bring the whole of the film-making world into review. We had also in mind trying to help British films, although I don't think there was any kind of narrowly Scottish nationalistic impulse in it or indeed a desire to promote British films alone. We always had a much wider view of the world of film-making and tried to enlist a wide range of contributors. We had some remarkable people, some of them in Scotland. For example, a friend of Grierson's, Alexander Werth in Paris, was one of the very earliest contributors and Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Ivor Montagu also wrote for it. Basil Wright was a regular contributor to the film review section. And Grierson himself chose to publish all his early theoretical writing about the documentary idea in *Cinema Quarterly*. During the three years of its existence, Grierson's articles were the backbone of the journal.

*Cinema Quarterly contains periodic quasi-editorials, often signed by Norman Wilson. The editorial in the first issue of Autumn 1932 comes down very hard against commercial cinema, particularly Hollywood, and specifically cites Le Million (1931), Mädchen in Uniform (1931), Kameradschaft (1931) and Tabu (1929) as constituting excellence in cinema. Would anti-Hollywood/pro-Europe have been the dominant tendency in the magazine?*

I think it would be. You have to remember that coming into Britain at that time there would be perhaps five hundred films a year from Hollywood, and the number of films coming in from Europe was a tiny percentage of that. And these seemed to us to need much more support than the great mass of Hollywood films. It was the best of the films that were coming in from France and Germany. The repertory cinemas in London, the Academy especially, were needing support then because they were the main avenue for the introduction of these films into Britain.

*Cinema Quarterly also had impulses to avant-gardism and modernism; for example, the pieces by Herbert Read and Hugh MacDiarmid.*



Yes. Now the piece by Herbert Read (who was Professor of Fine Art at Edinburgh University and President of the Film Guild) was the text of an address to the Edinburgh Film Guild, the first time an intellectual had addressed himself to an analysis of the art of the film. I can still remember him posing this to an audience of us and saying, in effect, is the film an art, what else can it be? It involves *selection*.

*One of the most attractive features of Cinema Quarterly was the virtually equal presence of critics and film-makers in its pages. Was this holding together of theory and practice a particularly conscious element in the journal?*

Yes. I would answer positively yes on that. There was also the accident that the documentary film-makers were also highly articulate. Film-makers like Basil Wright, Paul Rotha, Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton could write. We did invite some other directors, Victor Saville, for example, and Balcon too. One or two others. But they didn't have the inclination. And *Cinema Quarterly* never paid for any contributions. There was never that attraction in it either.

*Going back, once more, to Hugh MacDiarmid's piece. Its presence, arguing almost abstractly for 'poetry' in the cinema, draws attention to a curious absence in the journal — that is any discussion of the idea of a Scottish national cinema.*

Yes. I think this is a very fair point, and especially looking back on it today, it might seem a strange absence there. But I don't think we were ready to discuss even the potential or the potential emergence of a national cinema at that time. I don't remember us ever discussing it as something that we ought to be doing because it didn't seem practicable at that time.

*What other journals were current at that time?*

*Close-Up* was still being published briefly. I think it lasted for a year or so after *Cinema Quarterly* appeared and then, with the formation of the British Film Institute, *Sight and Sound* (1932 — ) appeared. But *Sight and Sound* at that time was very much an educationally-slanted publication: it didn't concern itself very much, if at all, with the aesthetic of film-making. These were the only journals at that time, and then, of course *Cinema Quarterly* itself was taken over by Grierson and developed into a monthly, *World Film News* (1936 — 8), which went on for a number of years. Grierson wanted a more active and more regularly publishing journal, so that he could use it for advancing arguments and promoting and attacking things which wasn't possible with the leisurely publication of a quarterly.

*Did Cinema Quarterly have an international circulation?*

Yes.

*What kind of people were reading it?*

The Film Society movement itself was the main audience for *Cinema Quarterly*.



*Where did Cinema Quarterly's funding come from?*

It came from ourselves, because the expenses were absolutely minimal. There was very little outlay at all, apart from the printing, and the circulation, plus the advertising that I was able to coax out of Wardour Street, enabled us to carry on.

#### GRIERSON

*Grierson's general influence on film culture as a whole has been well documented and is well understood. But what isn't absolutely clear is his influence on specifically Scottish film culture.*

I think that Grierson stood behind us all in Scotland as a kind of conscience. Even though he was abroad, we were all aware of the standards that he set for himself and for other people. I can give one example of that. I think that I started to write for *Cinema Quarterly* too early: it ought to have come perhaps five years later. I didn't have either the maturity or the range that I ought to have had to be writing in a publication like that. I remember Grierson falling on me like a ton of bricks because I had written a piece which, in his opinion, didn't merit publication in the journal. Although working outside Scotland, Grierson was sufficiently often here for us never to forget about him. During the whole of the thirties he was coming to and fro and talking regularly to the film societies, in Glasgow, in Stirling, in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We were conscious that he, although outside Scotland, had never forgotten the country and was looking for every kind of opportunity to make films here.

*At what point did he become an institutional influence, in other words, joining Scottish committees, and so on?*

I think that was at the formation of the first Films of Scotland committee. When the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow was being set up, there was to be a film pavilion and an opportunity to show films regularly there during the whole period of the Exhibition. A Committee was formed: among the members were Sir Alexander King, who was chairman of the later Films of Scotland Committee, George Singleton and Charles Oakley. Grierson was given the commission to produce the half-dozen films that we have already mentioned, and that was his first involvement institutionally with things in Scotland. There was no other reason for the Committee's existence but to produce the set of films for the 1938 Exhibition. Grierson was the motivating force and the guiding light over that time.

*Jim Hillier and Alan Lovell in Studies in Documentary (1972) recognise Grierson's achievement, but at the same time are quite critical of him, as in the following passage:*

*... Grierson does not seem to have been much attracted by Soviet techniques. The distrust bred by his Calvinist background for fiction*



*and artifice was one reason for this lack of interest. More important seemed to be his ideological difference from the Soviet directors. He felt their methods of intense dramatisation were appropriate only to a revolutionary situation. But political revolutions were not the real stuff of the historical process for Grierson.*

*This quotation connects with a criticism which is often heard nowadays that the most conspicuous absence from Grierson's work is a sense of class and class conflict. Is that a fair comment?*

I really don't find this a fair comment, nor indeed very accurate. If one takes that first part, 'Grierson does not seem to have been much attracted by Soviet techniques'. If you analyse *Drifters* (1929) and if you see it as I have done on a number of occasions in the same programme as *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), you can see as clearly as night and day the influence of Soviet techniques on that film. And therefore I really don't understand that point. Grierson knew *Potemkin* so very well: he had prepared the United States version of that film and as he often said, he knew the film shot by shot and cut by cut. It seems to me to be strangely inaccurate to say that he wasn't influenced by Soviet techniques. I don't understand that. 'The distrust bred by his Calvinist background for fiction and artifice was one reason for the lack . . .' I think that this might be nearer a fair comment. Fiction and artifice are certainly two things that one doesn't regularly associate with Grierson. If that statement were isolated without adding it to Soviet techniques then I think that would be a fair comment.

*Could we go back to that last general remark which was made in relation to the Hillier/Lovell book, that the most conspicuous absence in Grierson's work is a sense of class and class conflict?*

I wonder how the film *Housing Problems* (1935) would fit into that? I agree with you that in the earlier documentaries, where there were a lot of requirements being forced on Grierson at the time, there is very little evidence of either class or class conflict there. But surely, when you come to *Housing Problems*, you have, for its day, this extreme example of a film where a sense of class and class deprivation is as acute as you would find anywhere, and even seeing the film today the impact is tremendous. In its day it had an historical impact, translated into newspaper articles as it very quickly was, arousing people's consciences about slum conditions in Britain, far too widespread as they were at the time. And, therefore, I think that there is a clear sense of class in that later film, but possibly it's not true of some of the other films that were made earlier.

*The point about this absence in Grierson's work would raise the issue of Grierson's attitude to the State, seeing the State as fundamentally a benevolent institution.*



Yes, I think there we have got to recognise that Grierson during the whole period was a state servant, and I think that, in that sense, the comment is justified.

*How far was Grierson a nationalist in recognising that Scotland occupied a subordinate role in the State?*

I think that the nearest Grierson came to making a comment in depth about the Scottish situation was the group of films that he made in 1938. But they were still films made under certain restraints: the restraints of public exhibition. The motivation for these films was not a desire for social change, as undoubtedly the Russian films had; they were made to project a country, and he got as deeply as possible into the life of the country in his projection. But he wasn't intending to change anything, basically, or primarily, in the making of these films. Grierson wanted to make films about Scotland with such depth as he could achieve inside the institutional restrictions that he was operating within at the time. He was always operating within limits imposed partly by the source of the financier's sponsorship, and partly by the kind of film which cinemas were prepared to show throughout the country. That probably sums it up.

#### GROUP 3 AND SCOTLAND

*Certain Group 3\* productions were Scottish projects, most notably The Brave Don't Cry (1952) and Laxdale Hall (1952). Was there a sense at the time of creating a new image of Scotland in these films?*

In the case of *The Brave Don't Cry*, yes. In the case of *Laxdale Hall*, no. *Laxdale Hall* happened because there was a script that had been written for Balcon by Eric Linklater. Balcon, of course, was the head of Group 3 as well as of Ealing. He couldn't take it on at Ealing and he offered it to Grierson, who seized on it, partly because there were so few stories that were ready for film-making and Group 3's eternal problem was that they never had enough material ready to go before the cameras. Here was something that was ready to go, and it was made in the romantic tradition of the ignorant peasants fighting London bureaucrats kind of thing. In Scotland it was one of the most successful Scottish films ever made. It didn't make very much impact in England and it got as rough a deal from the distributors as most of the other Group 3 films did. The case of *The Brave Don't Cry* was entirely different. Here was a subject that was as close to Grierson's heart as anything he had ever made. He had grown up in a mining community and seen the worst of the effect of

\*In 1949 the Labour Government set up the National Film Finance Corporation to provide forms of government guarantee for certain kinds of independent film production in the UK. A subsidiary dimension of this was the creation in 1951 of Group 3 with Grierson as Executive Producer. With tax-supported production costs, the Group produced twenty-two feature films in its four-year life.



miners' strikes and deprivation in their lives and soup kitchens and all that kind of thing. The Knockshinnoch mine disaster was in the news, and he seized on that as a theme for a film and got Montagu Slater to write the story for it. Grierson himself was very much involved at all stages in the making of that film, and was deeply moved by it. I saw it with him several times, and incredible though it may seem, he was moved to tears when he was watching that film, even though he'd seen it being made. When the film was finished he showed it to Norman Wilson and myself in London when we were looking for a film to open the Edinburgh Film Festival, and we were both deeply struck by the film, and we thought that here, for almost the first time, was a film recognisably about the reality of life in Scotland — it wasn't an escapist film, a West Coast comedy or any of the other things, and there were real people in that film. He had the great advantage of having the full roster of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre to draw on at a time when they were at the very best of their acting abilities, and he used them to the full. That film meant a great deal to Grierson. We decided to show it, and incredibly, from that moment onwards, the Wardour Street people who had always tried by means fair and foul to defeat the Group 3 idea were determined that we would not open the Edinburgh Film Festival with it. They kept offering us this film and that film and so on, in a way that was utterly disgraceful. They thought that by dangling other propositions before us we would discard this film and choose one of the films that they were offering. But we refused to do that; we stuck firmly by the choice of that film and we opened the Film Festival triumphantly with *The Brave Don't Cry* in that year (1952).

#### INSTITUTIONS

*Clearly we are primarily interested in the historical emergence and development of the major institutions in Scottish film culture such as the Scottish Film Council, Films of Scotland and the Edinburgh Film Festival.*

We are talking now of the very earliest period of the thirties when the film society movement was beginning to spread throughout Britain from London. The Glasgow Film Society was the first to be formed outside of London, followed very shortly after by the Edinburgh Film Guild, and then in Scotland by other film societies in Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness, and eventually by a hundred or so societies in Scotland here. The Edinburgh Film Guild was always a slightly different organisation from the others. It tried to have a broader remit which was concerned with other things than merely the showing of films. It arranged international exhibitions of film stills and set designs and it encouraged people to come and talk about film-making, which was a constant preoccupation. And a great many of the other things that happened over the next twenty to twenty-five years emerged from



the activities of the Edinburgh Film Guild. There was a Federation of Scottish Film Societies formed when there were only three film societies. I was the Secretary for some twenty-five years, and helped to form all these other film societies. As the pressure was getting under way to set up the British Film Institute, there was a very strong film society movement in Scotland, and an equally strong educational film movement. There was the Scottish Educational Film Association, which, like the film society movement, had branches all over the country. These were the two bodies which, coming together, helped in the formation of the Scottish Film Council. Some of us took the lead in this, held public meetings in Edinburgh here, saying that we must not become just a branch of the BFI, but that we ought to have an independent Scottish body because we had a different set-up. In England at that time there was no Federation of Film Societies and there was no educational film association of any kind. The other elements in the SFC were the film trade represented through the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, the KRS, and a third element, called the Public Interest, which brought in bodies like the Women Citizens' Association.

*Lines of demarcation seem to have been observed in those days, giving the BFI responsibility for the art of the film, and the SFC a more service-oriented role. Was this a split you approved of at the time?*

It was a split I accepted as being realistic in relation to the situation. The Governors of the SFC were there as elected elements composing the SFC because of their leadership of either the film society movement, or of the educational film movement, or they were people in public life who had demonstrated their interest in the cinema. They weren't appointed from above; they were genuinely there because of their real interest in movies. That was one of the differences. The other big difference from the beginning, or from nearly the beginning, was that the BFI had the National Film Archive and at that time such a thing was way, way beyond the capacity of the SFC, which was very largely an honorary and voluntary organisation for a long time. It was many years before there was a paid secretariat in the SFC. I think it was a real demonstration of the strength of the interest of the constituent organisations that their leaders were prepared to give of their time without even expenses to attend meetings and write articles and so on. The name of Charles Oakley must be remembered in this connection with great honour, because he for many years accepted the organisational responsibilities of the SFC and ran it from his own office. The one element that was present in the Scottish Film Council and absent from the BFI at that time was the educational element. In the BFI there was no link with any kind of teacher/classroom use of the film whatsoever, because there was a separate organisation (the Educational Foundation for Visual Aids as it became) which carried on the whole of the educational side of the use of film in England and Wales. The educational use in Scotland, pro-



moted and stimulated by the SFC, was the main difference between the two organisations.

*Going back to the historical demarcation of responsibilities, with the BFI being concerned with the art of the film and the SFC being given a more service-oriented role, it is sometimes a source of puzzlement that the marked growth of film publications and film education through the BFI has, in general, not been paralleled through the SFC. Is it the historical demarcation which is the cause of that, would you say?*

I think that, historically, the SFC regarded film education (as opposed to the classroom use of film in other subjects) and film culture as the province of the film society movement. The teaching of film culture was a responsibility accepted and carried out by the film society movement, and in that way, I think, the SFC felt that the job was being done for them by one of the constituent bodies of the SFC.

#### WORKERS' FILM SOCIETIES

*We get a sense, from time to time, of a somewhat submerged workers' film movement in Scotland in the thirties. Did you relate to this in any way?*

Yes. This is something I was very conscious of and it goes back to my days in journalism. There were in existence in Edinburgh, and I think in certain of the other cities in Scotland, workers' film societies. These were the bodies that first showed Soviet films in this country, and it was certainly under their auspices that I first saw films like *Earth* (1930) and *Potemkin* and other early Russian revolutionary films. I think a lot of us were members of both the Edinburgh Film Guild and of the Workers' Film Society, which didn't really last very long. It had such a dominating political bias that people, I think, got a little tired of it, and also once the earliest of the films had passed on, there weren't enough films coming after that to carry on the interest.

*Did you get a sense of workers themselves making their own films and showing them in these situations?*

No, there wasn't that at all. It was a *showing* of films rather than making. I don't think there was any lead into the making of films at that time.

*The Co-operative Society was quite active in film production and film exhibition in England. Were there any Co-operative Film Societies active in Scotland?*

Not to my knowledge.

*Was there any relationship at all between the SFC and those workers' film societies?*

Again, not to my knowledge.

#### THE AMATEUR FILM-MAKING MOVEMENT

*One gets a very strong sense, today and in the recent past, of a very ac-*



*tive amateur film-making movement in Scotland. How did this come about historically?*

There was a remarkably strong amateur film movement, and one of the very best examples of that was the film society that existed at the Glasgow School of Art from which Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar emerged, and others as well. There were others in different parts of Scotland – other amateur film societies – and the first of the film festivals was organised by the Meteor Film Society in Glasgow, which was an organisation run by Stanley Russell, a film-maker of those days. I think it was run by him for a year, and held in the little Lyric Theatre, and then that was taken over by the Scottish Film Council which has run it continuously thereafter. I think it has been a very valuable movement because a number of pretty distinguished people are brought up from London to act as adjudicators at that festival, and their comments are influential in giving direction and quality to the amateur film-making movement in Scotland. The amateur film-makers were directly represented on the SFC.

*We get a strong sense of that whole movement being a very private kind of movement, and not much sense of the films being seen and discussed and responded to in other areas. Would that be a fair comment?*

Yes, I think it would. I'm reluctant to say so, because I wouldn't like to pass any kind of criticism on the amateur film movement and I think it's doing a good job, but they are a little bit inclined to work unto themselves and not to face the public on bigger occasions. I think they might benefit if they did so.

*Was this true in the thirties?*

No. I think it wasn't true of these earlier periods. There were public performances held – I mentioned the ones in the old Lyric Theatre in Glasgow – and it was there, of course, that Norman McLaren's first experiments in the use of colour were shown. Grierson was adjudicator that year and was sitting beside me. When this came up on the screen, he grasped my arm – I've still got the marks on it – and said 'Who is that?' – barking it out – and I told him. 'Take me to him' he said. And so we went, and that was his first meeting with Norman McLaren. So things happened out of the amateur film movement. I don't know to what extent that ideal of public performance has persisted but it was a good thing in its time and something in this instance happened from it.

*That was the case then with a film like Hell Unlimited (1936)?*

Yes. *Hell Unlimited* was seen and shown by the film societies who were behind that film. It wasn't tucked away on a shelf: it was quite well known.

#### THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

*At a certain point you ceased to be a practising journalist and became a civil servant with special responsibilities in the area of film. How did this*



*happen and what were the responsibilities you had?*

In 1940 I was invited to join what was then called the Public Relations Branch of the Scottish Office because of my particular knowledge of film. There were during the war all sorts of arrangements for the showing of films throughout Scotland, but more importantly, propaganda films for the war effort were being made in Scotland, and I was invited in to write these films and to be responsible for the production of them. I can remember two in particular: one was a film called *Crofters* (1944), a very beautiful film about the life of the crofter in north-west Sutherlandshire, produced by Edgar Anstey and beautifully photographed in that area of Scotland.

*What was the production company then?*

It was Green Park. There wasn't a Scottish company with sufficient experience to handle film-making of that kind, with the possible exception of Campbell Harper Films, who made one or two films, the best of which was one on fishing called *Caller Herrin'* (1947). They made another one called *Freedom of Aberfeldy* (1943), which was also a pretty good film. But the other film which I think stands out from that group was a remarkable film called *Waverley Steps* (1948), a very good film on Edinburgh.

*And did you shift roles in the civil service with relation to film?*

There was a senior staff of about four or so and each person had responsibility for public relations policy for a department – Agriculture, Health, Education, Home Affairs. But overriding that, I had responsibility for the entire film output of all the government departments in Scotland. There were films like *Children of the City* (1944), for example, which was about life in Dundee, directed by Donald Alexander and produced by Paul Rotha, and a very fine film indeed that was. There was a film about the life of a Highland doctor, called simply *Highland Doctor* (1943). There was another film about birth control called *Birthday* (1946) and all sorts of other films of a social content which were really quite important films in the history of the documentary movement. They were not made by Scottish units, but they were made for the Scottish departments, and I wrote the outline treatment for most of them. Not the full shooting script, but the outline treatment.

*What would you say are the benefits and limitations of being involved with the State as a public servant?*

The benefits were that where you had an imaginative administrator behind you, you were able to do things which, if you had had some narrow-minded bureaucrat, you would have never been able to do. If we take, for example, *Waverley Steps*. The Secretary of the Home Department at that time was a brilliant man, Sir Charles Cunningham, who later became Head of the Home Office in London, and when I went with the treatment of that film to him, he looked at it with a bit of a grimace as if to say that he didn't see that this was going to serve the



purposes of the Home Department very much. But he was a member of the Edinburgh Film Guild. He knew what a good film was, and he could see in reading it that this was going to make a good film. And he agreed to the expenditure of public money on the making of that film. The disadvantage, of course, is that there is always a certain point of social criticism beyond which you can't go, although we got pretty near it in the case of *Children of the City*.

*These films were getting commercial release?*

Yes.

#### THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

*How did the Edinburgh International Film Festival come about and what were its aims at the time?*

It came about at the same time as the parent Festival of the Arts in Edinburgh in 1947. Norman Wilson and I thought there ought to be a film contribution made to the Festival. We thought that we ought to have a Festival of what we called documentary films, although it is very important to remember that it wasn't in any sense a festival of short films, it was of films of a realistic kind. In the very first year we premièred films like *Paisa* (1946) and *Farrebique* (1947) in this country. They were films which were documentary in character and realistic in approach. We hired what was then the biggest cinema in Edinburgh, the Playhouse, and ran the Festival for eight days. There were four performances in the 3,000 seater cinema, and the rest of them in the little cinema that we had by that time created in the first Filmhouse in Hill Street. Our motivation was to give a platform in Edinburgh to documentary film-making around the world. We did attract a lot of film-makers and a lot of films to Edinburgh. It should be remembered that it was only the third film festival in the world at that time, Venice was first and Cannes came second, but Edinburgh actually has a longer unbroken record than Cannes. The emphasis on documentary continued for several years, and I think it was still the kind of emphasis we looked for in any feature film we showed. In *Jour de Fête* (1949), for example, there was a kind of a documentary background for comedy, and we quite readily selected that film for showing. So it wasn't any kind of narrow conception of documentary. We also showed Nicole Védres' film *Paris 1900* back in the early days, and then, most memorably, we gave the world première of *Louisiana Story* (1948).

*There is a clear connection between your work in the thirties and the Festival. Did the Festival then emerge substantially out of the Film Guild?*

It was founded by the Film Guild with a kind of advisory council which brought in people from London. Again, there was the support of all of the documentary film-makers, and Grierson himself — that was his year at UNESCO — came to open the Festival on the very first year.



*There was no local money, no corporation money?*

No local money whatsoever. We had a film festival fund which eventually produced a few hundred pounds, but it was really nothing. The Festival existed on the box-office returns and it was run like that. Again, the work was done almost wholly voluntarily with one paid secretary. I took my holidays during the period to work night and day to help to run the Festival and equally a lot of other people gave of their time voluntarily and out of sheer enthusiasm for the idea.

*At what point did the SFC become involved with the Festival?*

The story there becomes rather complicated. After I was appointed director of Films of Scotland, I had less time for this kind of thing. It was inevitable that we should bring in some other people to help run it. We tried for a year or two to bring in a person who acted for a few months of the year as Director, but that really didn't work. It needed to be a whole round the year commitment. One year we went to the SFC and Don Elliot became Director for one year and even Ronnie Macluskie himself (the present Director of the SFC) was Director for another year, and so on. But, no fault of theirs, that wasn't really a satisfactory way to run a Festival either.

*Did these changes in personnel bring about changes in policy?*

Not at this time, because the policy was still really dictated by the Film Guild personnel on the Council and Norman Wilson and I were pretty clearly the people who were running the show and choosing the films. There were several others as well: for example, Arthur Brown was a very prominent member, and Jack Firth, David Prenderleith and a lot of other people who were on the Council and who had strong opinions on the films.

*Are we right in thinking that in the period of Murray Grigor's directorship there was a development in policy?*

Yes. What took place then was that when we realised that this kind of appointment of a Director for a month or two simply wasn't working, the Films of Scotland Committee agreed that there should be a *pro tem.* appointment of my assistant to the post of Festival Director. The first person to whom that applied was David Bruce, and he was Director for one year, and he was followed by Murray Grigor who for three years or so acted as Director of the Festival and assistant to me at Films of Scotland. Murray became very enthusiastic about the Festival and also, to be fair to everybody, developed his own ideas about how the Festival should be run. He brought in his own people: Lynda Myles joined him as assistant at that time and so on. The Festival took a change in direction with Murray as Director and he freed himself from what he felt, maybe with some justification, to be the restrictive influences of the Guild on the Festival at that time.

*Our impression is that the policy of the Festival at that time began to connect with an emerging position in British film culture – the*



*reevaluation of Hollywood – that had come in through journals like Movie (1962 – ), Oxford Opinion (1956 – 65) and Sequence (1946 – 52).* I think it's also true to say that the Festival for a year or two lost its direction. The documentary idea was no longer a sufficiently strong idea to mount a Festival on and even the kind of broadening on that basis wasn't sufficient either. It needed a fresh injection of ideas which Murray and his colleagues were able to give it. There was resistance to some of the things Murray and his friends did, but nevertheless, it was an injection of vigour and youthful enthusiasm which the Festival needed.

#### FILMS OF SCOTLAND

##### *Why was it necessary to set up Films of Scotland?*

It was necessary because at that time (1954) the Government had closed down government film-making, so the kind of films that I had been producing while at St. Andrews House came to a sudden end. The then Director of the Scottish Information Office, Willie Ballantine, felt that this was a serious lack in the projection of Scotland. He wasn't going to get any Government money for it and therefore another way had to be found of setting up an organisation that would promote the production and distribution of Scottish films in the national interest. And so there was brought into existence a body called the Films of Scotland Committee which had some similarities to the earlier one in 1938 but it was operating under the umbrella of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry. It was always just on the edge of that umbrella; it never got very much coverage from the Scottish Council. The only money that it had was a grant of £10,000 from the then Hugh Fraser. And from the very beginning, and this is by far the most important point that must be made, the Committee had to exist on earnings from films that won distribution in the cinemas on their own terms as entertainment. The way that the Committee operated was that I went to people who wanted or could be persuaded or could be dragooned into having a film made. The promise was made by the Committee that if the money for the film was put up we would have it distributed. The reason we could say that with some confidence before even the films were made was that our Chairman, Sir Alexander King, who had a large chain of cinemas in Scotland, was a pretty influential figure in the film world, and he was able to say to a distributor when the films were there, please will you set up this film for distribution. Mark you, they would not have accepted it if the films had not reached a certain level. But nevertheless, there was just that extra push in getting the films accepted for distribution. And so, I had the pretty difficult job of going to different sponsors and trying to get them interested in the idea. We made a film on Aberdeen, one on the Outer Isles and one on the Edinburgh Festival. These were the first subjects that were made and they got pretty good distribution. Now at that time in Scotland the units that existed had no experience of making



films for showing in cinemas. Some of them were making industrial films: there were indeed only two, possibly three, units in existence. One in Edinburgh, Campbell Harper, and Stanley Russell in Glasgow. But they had no experience of making films of the quality that we were looking for, and that certainly the cinema distributors and exhibitors were looking for, and therefore we were forced willy-nilly to employ London units to make the first of the films. We did that, and – with Grierson always sitting in as production adviser on the films as he was a member of the Committee – we did achieve the necessary standards. More and more films grew out of that, and gradually we were able to move the film-making from London to Scotland, as intended. We did that as soon as we possibly could and eventually none of the films were made in London: all of them were made in Scotland here and the number of units steadily proliferated during that time. Campbell Harper made a number of the films and some of the people he trained moved off and set up their own film companies, like Mark Littlewood and Mike Alexander. Templar Film Studios in Glasgow employed a number of people including Laurence Henson and Eddie McConnell and they moved out and set up their companies and so on – and that went on all the way around. We were making sometimes twenty films a year, which was a fair production to maintain over that period.

*To what extent did the tie-up with industry or private money affect the view of Scotland that was projected through these films?*

Let me take the ship-building film as an example of that. When I first approached the Clyde Shipbuilders Association to suggest a film, they said they didn't really need a film because all their order books were full. But eventually (and in most cases, these campaigns to get people to make films lasted over a number of years and in this case over several years) we persuaded them to have a film made and the Central Office of Information met part of the cost of the film because it was going to be released overseas. We were given complete freedom in our tackling of the subject. The only requirement set down was that no name of an individual shipbuilding company was to be discernible in the film. It was to be a tribute to the Clyde and the men of the Clyde and the ships that came from the Clyde and not to individual firms. Grierson wrote the treatment for that film. He had seen the work of a young American film-maker, Hilary Harris, at one of the international festivals and he saw that he had the kind of bright eye that would bring a fresh vision, because the Clyde story had been told so often. He was brought in and employed by Riddell Black in his company (Templar Films) to make the film. At the end of the day we showed the film with some trepidation to the assembled Clyde shipbuilders and I can still remember sitting there shivering, wondering what they were going to say. Eventually, I said to John Rannie, who was the President of the Shipbuilders Association that year, 'Well, Mr Rannie, what do you think?'. He paused and then said 'I



have been sitting here utterly engrossed by this film. I have not a single criticism to make of it.' So that when you ask how did we cope with the sponsors of the films that is one example, there could be many others, but that is one example of the kind of experience we had.

*Are you saying that there was no substantial influence by the sponsors on the view of Scotland that was promoted through the films, that the image of Scotland projected was essentially the image of the film-makers themselves?*

Yes, if you include the guidance given by Films of Scotland. We believed that if we could get the commissions to make films on such subjects as shipbuilding or tweed or carpet-making or agriculture and so on, we could then give the films a bigger horizon or wider sweep, a deeper significance. If we could bring these qualities to the films, then we would be satisfying our own requirement, which was to project the life and character of Scotland, although we had to accept that we were making a film about an industry or an activity or something else like that. We had therefore to satisfy the sponsor as well as do our own thing. But always there was that narrow way of proceeding, of keeping the balance between what you call the national purpose and the satisfaction of the producer.

*The remit of Films of Scotland was to project the life and achievement of Scotland. Did you feel that Films of Scotland did this?*

At the end of twenty years in the job and after the production of some one hundred and fifty films, I felt that we had covered a good deal of ground. We had covered all the key industries and we had covered a number of the great developments of that period. We had made films about the Forth and Tay road bridges, about Ravenscraig, about Invergordon and about the great hydro-electric developments and we dealt geographically with the country pretty fully, made films right from Shetland to Galloway. Also, we dealt with a lot of the cultural activities of the country. We made films about art and artists, and music and dancing, and some films about the great historical characters, Rennie MacIntosh, Robert Adam and others of that eminence. But my worry at the end of that time was that we had not reflected the human story of Scotland as fully as I would have liked to have done. I think that one reason for that was a simple one: that with no general fund available for film-making, we could very seldom go outside the range of our sponsor's interest in tackling a subject. If we could have had a general production fund (as I hoped we might have, and as Grierson asked the Secretary of State at the time if we could have) we might have been able to make films with another kind of social purpose, a different kind of attack, a different level of approach to life in the country. If we'd had that, we would have been able, I think, to have offered a fuller picture of Scotland than we were able to do. And so at the end of the period, I was satisfied in one way that I had done all I possibly could



with a non-financed organisation in helping the work of units, helping to give them experience and expand their activity in film-making, on which they've later built themselves. But I felt that somehow or other, there was one aspect of the work which I had not been able to accomplish, primarily for economic reasons and not because I did not recognise either the need for it, or the desire for it, or the ultimate importance of it.

*Looking back towards your journalism, both in The Scotsman and in Cinema Quarterly, you seem to have been open to a large number of influences, not just documentary but feature film-making, avant-gardism and modernism as well. That didn't seem to be reflected in Films of Scotland, which was very narrowly focused on the issue of documentary.* I wonder if you are saying that from a full knowledge of all the films. One of the things that I tried to do was to give an opportunity to such of the Scottish film-makers as had an inclination to break out of the documentary chain, if you like, to experiment in other ways. And most notably, there was an instance of that in Eddie McConnell. I remember giving him the opportunity of making a film on his own, and saying to him 'Here you are. All I'll say is, make a film on the colour of Scotland'. No other brief than that: no script, no treatment, nothing else, and he didn't have to submit any ideas. He was just told there's the budget, there's the idea, go and make that film. And he came back with a beautiful little film called *A Kind of Seeing* (1967), which was as near an avant-garde film as you could possibly have. It certainly wasn't a documentary film.

*Three terms have been dominating the discussion — sponsorship, either from Government or industry, documentary, either as a form or an attitude, and Grierson. These are terms which still circulate very powerfully in Scottish film-making. What problems do these terms present to contemporary Scottish film-makers and contemporary Scottish film culture?*

At the end of my period of *Films of Scotland*, I wanted to see us move out of the documentary area more completely into the story film area, and I thought that there were certain ideas that could be put over just as effectively in the story form as in the documentary form. We did make one trial film on the story line, a film called *The Duna Bull* (1971), which wasn't on a significant theme, even though it won an award in Melbourne as a supreme example of an analysis of life in an isolated community, which I thought was extraordinary. It was an attempt to give one of the Scottish companies experience in the handling of the story form, and I had visualised this leading onto the kind of film which is being made today by Bill Forsyth — the *Gregory's Girl* (1980) kind of film. I thought that if we gave them just enough experience in making a half-hour film it wasn't a very big step from that into making a longer story film. And so I had fairly clearly in mind that the documentary



idea, as far as the cinema was concerned (not television – because I think it is still highly relevant and appropriate for television) was no longer appropriate, because the audience doesn't have the receptive mood for getting any kind of message or lesson or anything of that kind. They don't want that, but they are prepared to have a story told to them, and if it happens to embody somewhere a point that we wanted to have made, good and well. In that way I thought we could expand out of the Grierson documentary sponsor area we have been speaking of, into a freer area of expression for film-makers, and there was just the first little taste of that in *The Duna Bull*.

### Note

This is an edited version of an interview conducted by John Caughie and Colin McArthur in Edinburgh on 19 February 1982. Full transcripts of the interview have been deposited in the Scottish Film Council, the Grierson Archive at the University of Stirling and the Library of the British Film Institute.



## 6 Workers' Films: Scotland's Hidden Film Culture

DOUGLAS ALLEN

Any idea of a 'popular film culture' in Scotland usually revolves round two themes. One is the film record of 'popular' music-hall comedians and stars like Harry Lauder and Will Fyffe, with their propagation of the 'tartan myth'. The other is the work of the documentary movement of the 1930s, which put 'the people' on the screen for the first time, with a mixture of social problem exposés and lyrical pictures of the working class. Grierson and key Scottish associates such as Harry Watt, Stewart McAllister, John Taylor and Norman McLaren were only the peak of a mass of film talent which left a depressed but politically active Scotland to enrich the documentary movement down south. Only on the occasional return visit north did they depict the Scottish scene in films like *The Face of Scotland* and *Wealth of a Nation*.

What has been neglected, though, is a third theme of popular Scottish film – the film culture of Scotland's socialist movement which flourished in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Such was the coherence, and the common aims and aspirations of this movement, that one is justified in describing it as a complete 'socialist counter-culture'. Expressions of a similar consciousness are discernible in groups such as the nineteenth-century German Social Democrats and the turn-of-the-century British Clarion movement, with their ethos of art, culture and sport as a means of escape from the harsh realities of working-class life. In Scotland, and especially the West of Scotland, this socialist counter-culture took the form of a network of clubs and institutions engaging in drama, literature, music, field sports, swimming and even rambling – all in the name of socialism. One important component of this counter-culture from the late twenties was the cinema.

There were two stages in the development of this film culture – a period from the late twenties through the thirties and forties of film-viewing; and, arising from this, a period in the late thirties of film-making.

The film-viewing side was composed of three distinct elements: first, the screening of the best of world socialist cinema by Workers' Film Societies; second, the more agitational use of film as propaganda during public rallies and fund-raising tours; and third, the screening of political films in commercial public cinemas.



The Workers' Film Society movement in Scotland, as in London, was an offshoot of the film society movement. The aim was the same: to bring 35mm. prints of banned Soviet films to the working class by showing them in cinemas on Sundays under club membership conditions. Workers' Film Societies appeared first in 1930 in Edinburgh, then in Dundee and St Andrews; but the most fertile ground was in Glasgow. A series of societies succeeded each other through the early thirties: the Glasgow Workers' Film Society (1930 – 1); the New Art Film Society (1931 – 3); the Film Section of the USSR Society (1932 – 3); and the West of Scotland Workers' Film Society (1934 – 5). Each showed films, usually on a monthly basis, in cinemas in working-class districts of the city. Annual membership ranged from 7/6d to 12/- for 8 to 10 showings, with half-price for the unemployed. The films shown were usually the standard Soviet classics of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko (as well as the occasional showing of Vertov's more unconventional *Man with a Movie Camera*), supported by documentary shorts on Soviet life.

The main reason for the swift turnover in Workers' Film Societies seems to have been the strict licensing regulations. These laid down a complex membership system involving the advance purchase of tickets from a recognised number of agents, usually local shop-keepers. The problems of this system can be appreciated on examining the minutes of Glasgow Corporation when, within a month in 1933, two Workers' Film Societies were closed down when the licensing council heard police reports of membership infringements.

This proved to be less of a problem in the late thirties when the last of the pre-war Workers' Film Societies was formed, the Scottish People's Film Association (SPFA). Sunday showings now took place in major city centre cinemas, probably reflecting the more 'respectable' nature of such an organisation in the era of the popular front crusade against fascism. Now everyone from the new Labour-controlled Corporation downwards was united in support of Republican Spain and similar causes for which the SPFA showed films and ran social evenings. The internationalism of the SPFA was shown by the acceptance of the position of Honorary President by Paul Robeson, one of Glasgow's most welcome and frequent visitors during this era.

By the post-war years, Workers' Film Societies were an accepted part of Glasgow life. Organisations such as the People's Film Society, Glasgow Unity Theatre Film Society and the Clydeside Film Society continued the tradition of bringing the best of world socialist cinema to the working class, until their demise by the mid fifties.

It was the massive popular front sentiment in Glasgow which gave rise to the second component of Glasgow's film-viewing culture – the agitational use of film to back up political public meetings. Chief exponent of this use of film was the Glasgow Kino Group, the Scottish branch of London Kino, who from 1933 had been showing and making working-



class films. The staple material on offer from Kino groups up and down the country was again Soviet classics, but this time with the vital difference that most prints were on the new 'safe' 16mm. film, which gained them exemption from licensing regulations.

The Glasgow Kino Group first appeared in 1935, hiring out Soviet films from Collet's Bookshop. But their showing of the propaganda documentary *Free Thaelmann!* at anti-fascist meetings through 1935 and 1936 was indicative of the direction the group would take over the next few years. For it was the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 which created a mass audience for anti-fascist propaganda and information films, and Kino became the chief outlet for the latest news from Spain in films such as *Defence of Madrid* and *Spanish Earth*. Giving shows often five nights per week, the group toured Central Scotland attending virtually every left-wing event in the late thirties from May Day celebrations, through hunger march receptions, to prestigious Paul Robeson concerts for Spain. Resources stretched occasionally to city centre cinema showings of 35mm. prints such as *They Shall Not Pass*, again to raise sympathy and money for Spain. Records show the group's takings to be often as much as £100 per week, and at one point they received the thanks of Senor Azcarate, the Spanish Ambassador to Britain, for the work they did for Spain.

An interesting insight to Glasgow life is shown by the third component of Glasgow's socialist film-viewing culture, commercial cinema showings. Contemporary newspapers record that the Orient Cinema, Gallowgate, in the heart of the working-class East End, occasionally showed among its traditional Hollywood fare films with titles such as *Soviet Russia* (3-day showing February 1933); *Whither Germany?* (perhaps *Kuhle Wampe*, 3-day showing March 1934); and *Moscow – Heart of Soviet Russia* (3-day showing April 1934). Whether audiences came in quite the same numbers as they came to see Clark Gable is not known, but even the appearance of such films in such a context is remarkable.

In Scotland, as elsewhere, the working-class movement regarded film-viewing as only a preliminary to film-making. The constitutions of most Workers' Film Societies from the Edinburgh Workers' Progressive Film Society to the SPFA included among their aims ' . . . to encourage the production of films of value to the working class' (EWPFs) or ' . . . to produce 16mm. documentaries on Scottish culture' (SPFA). No evidence survives of any of these aspirations being fulfilled. The only film records of Scottish working-class activities at this time seem to have been shot by workers' film teams from the south (such as the Workers' Topical Newsreel on the 1930 Hunger March).

It wasn't until the mid-thirties that film-making activities began, thanks to the Kino Group. This came about due to Kino's absorption of two remarkable talents from the Glasgow School of Art – Helen Biggar



and Norman McLaren. Their award-winning amateur films had established for them a local reputation as experimental film-makers of note; and their growing politicisation through the thirties was giving their films and scripts for proposed films an increasingly hard edge. This culminated in 1936 with the production of *Hell Unlimited*, a pacifist propaganda piece notable for its rejection of documentary realism in favour of a montage of fantasy, surrealism, animation and agit-prop. The film was taken up for distribution by Kino, and an association began between Biggar, McLaren and Glasgow Kino. With McLaren's subsequent departure for London to join the GPO Film Unit, most of the Glasgow Kino work was Biggar's: film of the Scottish contingent of the 1936 Hunger March for the Film & Photo League's *March Against Starvation*; an unrealised project surrounding the workers' occupation of a Borders textile factory; and a film of the 1937 May Day march in Glasgow. It was this latter event which inspired the only other major Kino production, *Challenge to Fascism*, a film record of the 1938 May Day march in Glasgow. Money was raised from the labour movement through appeals in the local labour press; and a team of film-makers under Biggar shot the march and specially staged sequences of a 'typical' Glasgow family (played by members of the Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group) attending the festivities. The film was shown at events such as the 1939 May Day celebrations, but by that time the imminent fall of Spain and outbreak of world war had taken much of the impetus out of the movement. Thereafter Helen Biggar was to devote most of her talents to designing for Glasgow Unity Theatre. Kino returned to its function as a film-showing body, with its equipment eventually ending up at Glasgow's Soviet Aid Shop, showing Soviet war-time propaganda films.

After the war there was no major revival of film-making activities to accompany the prestigious rise of Glasgow Unity Theatre. The only local film appears to have been *Let Glasgow Flourish*, a production of the Clydeside Film Society in the early fifties which looked at Glasgow's housing problem within the traditional documentary format. From there on, Scottish popular film culture was on the decline, along with the general decline of the socialist counter-culture in the years of fifties prosperity.

Looking back at this activist era of the twenties, thirties and forties how can we sum up this largely forgotten popular film culture? What brought about the phenomenon at that particular time, in that particular form and with those particular results? A number of significant points emerge.

The first thing to emphasise would be the solid local base from which the film culture emerged, the all-embracing socialist counter-culture in which working-class and sympathetic middle-class intellectuals met, discussed, debated, planned, acted and relaxed. Within this world, film



was just one of many means of communication and morale-boosting – the latest, most technological, and potentially most powerful and far-reaching. The ideal of a network of Workers' Film Societies viewing and making workers' newsreels, documentaries and features was attempted, but never quite attained, certainly not to the extent of another medium of communication within the counter-culture, the theatre.

Second is the educational element. The counter-culture was part of the great movement of working-class self-education, the desire to absorb the received knowledge and classics of the established political and artistic world (both bourgeois and 'progressive'). Hours of unemployment spent in local libraries made members of the workers' theatres experts on world drama – Shaw, O'Neill, O'Casey and Odets. Similar attention to the classics of world cinema showed this same desire for a grounding in the received world of art as a preliminary to the creating of a local, indigenous, working-class art. In film as in theatre in Glasgow, this extended to an initial grappling with Marxist theories of art, as can be seen from the articles, discussions and letters in the local socialist journals.

Third is the question of the technology of the movement, what we would now call the 'hardware'. Here the film culture faced vast problems compared with the relative cheapness and mobility of live drama. The problems and expense of handling film cameras, film stock, projectors, reels and screens put extra difficulties in the way of any pioneering film culture, let alone one operating in the penurious world of socialist politics. In Glasgow traditional methods were used to surmount these problems; the 'scrounging' of equipment by those members who had access to it, and the raising of finance from sympathetic 'establishment' figures, trade union and socialist subscriptions.

Fourth is the national – indeed world-wide – context in which the culture operated, the events which gave sustenance and inspiration to political activism. Here, interestingly enough, it was international events such as the Russian Revolution, anti-fascism and the Spanish Civil War which seemed to provide a stronger focus than more immediate local issues such as unemployment.

What reasons can we offer to justify looking at this forgotten culture? Can it have anything to say to our sophisticated, 'classless', highly educated, nuclear and video technology world, where only unemployment may seem to be a common factor?

One reason is precisely because the culture is half-forgotten. It is a key demonstration of the process of history by which those who challenge the dominant notions of the time are left largely unrecorded for posterity. Thus the acts of thousands of hard-working, dedicated activists are left unheralded and unsung, necessitating emergency historical rescue operations to allow the tribute that is due them to be paid.



But perhaps a more important reason is the implications it holds for those who look today for the revival of a popular Scottish film culture, one that goes beyond the music-hall image of Billy Connolly and the social problem exposés of the BBC's *Play for Today*. Is there a suitable base from which to work, a network of support groups, people with common values and aims willing to dedicate themselves to a cause? Is education playing its role, teaching people the techniques, history and theory of the particular art form, giving people the opportunity to develop and express themselves and their culture? Are the technological means available, the hardware cheap and accessible, and finance on hand to allow talents to stay within the local context yet still absorb international influences through travel and visits? Is the political motivation there, the issues that will arouse and inspire people to become engaged in political and cultural activism?

Many people will recognise that most of these elements are present in our contemporary culture, but are there any signs or prospects of them merging as a coherent and active counter-culture?

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### SOVIET AND LEFT FILM SHOWS IN GLASGOW

#### Season

1929-30 Glasgow Film Society (GFS): *End of St Petersburg*.

1930-1 GFS: *Storm Over Asia*, *The Battleship Potemkin*, at Gem, Great Western Road.

Glasgow Workers' Film Society: three or four films in Louvre, Duke Street, Parkhead; *The Battleship Potemkin*, *Earth*, *Spartakiade*, *Glimpses of Modern Russia*; *Mother* in three-day run at City Hall.

1931-2 GFS: *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* at Gem; *The Blue Express*.  
New Art Cinema Club: three or four films at King's (Charing Cross); *The Blue Express*.

1932-3 GFS: *Kuhle Wampe* at King's.

New Art Cinema Club: Soviet films at E. E. Picture House, Eglinton Street (no trace after December 1932).



- Film Section of Scottish USSR Society, Glasgow Branch: fortnightly shows at Gem, then Seamore, Maryhill Road; *Soviet Five Year Plan*, *Spartakiade*, *The Battleship Potemkin*, *Man With a Movie Camera*, *Shanghai, Alone*. Shows closed down by authorities January 1933.
- Orient Kinema, Sword Street, Gallowgate: three-day showing of *Soviet Russia* February 1933.
- 1933 - 4 Orient Kinema: three-day showing of *Kuhle Wampe* and *Whither Germany*, March, and three-day showing of *Moscow*, *Heart of Soviet Russia*, April.
- GFS: *The Road To Life*, showings at Cranston's.
- 1934 - 5 Workers' Film Society (West of Scotland): five or six films at Grand Central, Jamaica Street; *The Road to Life*, *War Is Hell*, *Storm Over Asia*, *The Blue Express*.
- 1935 - 6 GFS: *End of St Petersburg*.
- Glasgow Kine Group: films for hire include *Ten Days That Shook The World*, *New Babylon*; showings *Ten Days That Shook The World* (King's), *Free Thaelmann!* (St Andrews Hall), *New Babylon* (Masonic Halls, W. Regent Street), *Ten Days That Shook The World* (by Progressive Club at Keir Hardie Institute), *Three Songs of Lenin* (by Clarion Scouts at Coliseum).
- 1936 - 7 Glasgow Kino Film Group (based at Workers' Club, George Street): tours with 16mm. Spanish War films, including *Defence of Madrid*; shows of 16mm. Spanish and Soviet films at Lyric, Christian Institute; *The Road To Life*, *News From Spain*, *Hey-Rup* (Czech); 35mm. show at Cranston's of *They Shall Not Pass*.
- 1937 - 8 Glasgow Kino Film Group: tour with *Spanish Earth*, etc; in charge of shows for local Labour Party branches; *Road To Life*, *Mother*, *New Babylon*, *Millions Like Us* (Dixon Halls); shows of 35mm. films at Cranston's and Grand Central.
- GFS: *We From Kronstadt*
- Proletarian Film Guild: John Maclean festivals summer 1937.
- Scottish People's Film Association (SPFA): formed March 1938, showing in Grand Central (35mm.) of *We From Kronstadt*, *Land Without Bread*, *The New Gulliver*.
- 1938 - 9 SPFA: *Lenin in October*, *If War Should Come*, *The Battleship Potemkin*.



# 7 'Scotland doesna mean much tae Glesca': Some Notes on *The Gorbals Story*

JOHN HILL

If the representation of the Scots on the screen has been characteristically defined by the traditions of Kailyard and Tartanry it's probably a characteristic irony that one of the few attempts to break with such traditions should have been made in England and at a time when its progenitors were on the verge of dispersal. Such was the case of *The Gorbals Story*. Shot in 1949 at Merton Park Studios, London, and released (somewhat patchily) in 1950, it was to prove less of a prospectus for the future than a more or less fitting epitaph for one of Scotland's boldest theatrical experiments, that of Glasgow Unity Theatre.

It was during the Second World War that Glasgow Unity had emerged, when the economic necessity of pooling resources and an ethos of popular front collaboration had led to an amalgamation of Glasgow's leading left-wing theatre groups in 1940. As the choice of title would suggest, the impulse was also to forge a link with London Unity, whose project of a politicised working-class theatre was already yielding significant results.<sup>1</sup> Yet the identification of the two Unitys should not be taken too far. For crucial to the development of Glasgow Unity were questions which by their very nature could have no meaning for the rest of the Unity movement — that is to say, questions of how to forge a 'Scottish' identity, and produce work which was not only socialist but specifically Scottish as well.

The formulation that emerged was that of a 'Scottish People's Theatre'. As the leading Unity producer put it, 'What we are trying to create is a native theatre, something which is essentially reflecting the lives of the ordinary people of Scotland.'<sup>2</sup> In terms of productions this had two effects. First, an appropriation of the 'best' of broadly socialist drama (Ibsen, Gorky, O'Casey, Odets) 'seen not as isolated works of art but in the historical perspective of which they are part'.<sup>3</sup> Second, and most importantly, the production of new Scottish plays written by new Scottish playwrights. Although I have noted elsewhere the ambivalence which was subsequently to emerge in Unity's thinking about the type of Scottish play it should be encouraging, the initial direction is at least



clear enough.<sup>4</sup>

For crucial to Glasgow Unity's development was the determination to come to terms with the contemporary Scottish experience of the urban lowlands. With the exception of Joe Corrie, Scots drama (where it had achieved an identity at all) had singularly failed to engage with this experience. Both previous attempts to found a national theatre and accompanying drama – the Glasgow Repertory Company (1909) and the Scottish National Players (1921) – had invariably opted for historical and/or rural settings (usually some 'unspoilt Highland paradise') cemented together by some reactionary-mystical ideology of reaching the 'national soul' through the 'peasant or rural character'.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Unity sought to bring the city, the factory, and the slum vividly centre stage and address itself directly to the material problems and social relations of contemporary capitalism. Unity's first new play, then, was appropriately James Barke's *Major Operation* (1941) which set itself firmly in the shipyards of the Clyde and attempted a dramatic working out of popular front policy through its bringing together of militant worker and middle-class ally. And this was to be succeeded by others of a similar ilk. Three more plays, indeed, by Barke himself: *The Night of the Blitz* (1944), *When the Boys Come Home* (1945), and *Her Name Was Barbara Allen* (1946); John Kincaid's treatment of striking aircraft workers, *Song of Tomorrow* (1943); Ena Lamont Stewart's observations of Glasgow life, *Starched Aprons* (1945) and *Men Should Weep* (1947); and George Munro's exposure of a young Scottish footballer destroyed by commercialism, *Gold in His Boots* (1947).<sup>6</sup>

But without doubt it was *The Gorbals Story* (1946) which most clearly represented Glasgow Unity's concerns. It was their biggest success, their biggest money-maker and most-toured production. It fitted the bill of being both Scottish and working-class and was penned by a native Glaswegian, *Bulletin* artist and Unity member, Robert McLeish. It captured a large and enthusiastic working-class audience and intervened directly in the contemporary problem of homelessness. Indeed, at its Glasgow première (2 September 1946), squatters' leader P.C.B. McIntyre was allowed on stage to harangue the assembled audience, which included squatters and their supporters, who sat as guests of honour in the circle while Glasgow's Lord Provost and other civic dignitaries squeezed uncomfortably together in the stalls.

Yet in the end *The Gorbals Story* was to prove something of a false friend. Earlier in 1946 the company had turned professional and when times got hard a production of the play became the inevitable fall-back. Moreover, the increasing need for commercial security was in turn destined to lead the company and *The Gorbals Story* south to England. Not that Unity could be held solely to blame. Inevitably, during their career they had faced the suspicion and indeed downright hostility of institutional authority. The governors of the Royal Scottish Academy of



Music denied them a permanent home in the Athenaeum, the Arts Council withdrew its financial support under the most dubious of circumstances, while as late as March 1948 (when most of Unity's more agitational activities had long since ceased) fear of 'Communist domination' induced Ayreshire County Council to prevent them from playing to schools. Under such circumstances, it was difficult not to accept a West End run at the Garrick. And yet, while it may have made temporary commercial sense, for a 'Scottish People's Theatre' to try and make its way in the London West End was clearly a nonsense. By 1951 Glasgow Unity had all but vanished.<sup>7</sup>

However, the foray into London did have one lasting consequence, the production of a film. Spotted at the Garrick by the Hyams Brothers, Phil and Sid, the play was put into production by their film company, Eros, employing Scotsman David MacKane to script from McLeish's original and direct. Encouragingly received in the trade press, a general release nonetheless proved elusive and commercially and critically the film sank without trace.

In many ways the commercial and critical failure went together. The contemporary trade press reviews reveal not only an uncertainty as to how the film might be sold (*Today's Cinema* (12 January 1950) makes the rather ironic suggestion of an appeal to an 'intelligent patronage') but also an uncertainty as to just what it is that's to be sold in the first place. The *Kinematograph Weekly* review (19 January 1950) is instructive in this respect. For the film is not only 'squalid' and 'sordid' but also 'romantic'; not only 'propaganda' but 'thoughtful'; 'regional' yet 'intensely human'; an 'impressive British problem vehicle' and a 'melodrama'. What seems strikingly absent is any certainty over what sort of critical vocabulary could or should be used. The British cinema's vogue for working-class realism is still a long way off while the film's 'Scottishness' seems to make it something of a one-off eccentricity in no way expressive of any broader social or cultural dynamic.

So the 'recovery' of *The Gorbals Story* is not just about showing what Glasgow Unity were like (instructive though that may be) nor merely reversing the terms of conventional film historiography by demanding the inclusion of a hitherto neglected 'masterpiece' (which on any grounds the film is far from being). The appropriate terminology is probably 're-insertion' rather than 'recovery': the re-insertion of the film back into a context and back into a critical perspective. To bother to do that at all is clearly to signal the film as in some way 'important' but it's also to suggest that as an example from the past it's not there simply to be celebrated or imitated but rather to be interrogated in such a way as to give it a use-value for the present. What seems 'important', then, about *The Gorbals Story* and worth exploring further is its essentially 'progressive' attempt to establish an oppositional modality to the dominant cultural traditions of Kailyard and Tartanry. But what, on the



other hand, seems to limit and circumscribe its achievement is its choice of aesthetic devices which not only serve to block off certain crucial areas of experience but work to reproduce an ideology that is ultimately reactionary.

In many ways the terms of the film's 'oppositional modality' are signalled and structured into the opening of the film itself when we are introduced to the artist Johnnie Martin (Russell Hunter) reflecting upon Glasgow. Over shots of Sauchiehall Street, St. Enoch's Square, a city centre hotel and restaurant, Kelvingrove Park, the University and Museum, he describes: 'A city of well-stocked shops and spacious stores, big hotels, comfortable restaurants, fine theatres, luxurious cinemas. In short a successful city . . . a city to be proud of.' A shot moving across a bridge over the Clyde, followed by various shots of the South Side, then ensue while he continues: 'But strangely enough the Glasgow I generally portray lies on the other side of the slow-flowing waters of the Clyde. The Glasgow of grey skies, grey buildings, depression, frustration, streets in which passers-by walk grimly on their predestined course. A course leading through the darkness of poverty to an almost inevitable end.' Just as so many Unity plays had sought to define the contemporary Scottish experience in relation to the Clyde, so it becomes a crucial dramatic and ideological axis for *The Gorbals Story*. On its one side, the shops and finer achievements of the city centre and West End; on the other, the poverty and depression of the South Side.

This opposition in fact represents something of a shift from the original play, which is more conventionally marked by its hostility to Kailyard and Tartanry. Peggy, for example, is allowed to make scathing comment on 'yon pictures o' short-bread – big blue hills and coos that need a haircut' as well as Scottish nationalists wearing a kilt and 'staunin' up like William Wallace', by way of a conclusion that 'Scotland doesna mean much tae Glesca folk'. Hector's departure from the Highlands some twenty years before is likewise emphasized, while songs such as 'My Ain Wee Hoose' and 'The Banks of Loch Lomond' are used as dramatic counterpoint to the realities of Glasgow slum life. The irrelevance of rural values to urban Glasgow is clearly implicit in the film (with a portrait of Burns and pictures of a young couple looking across a gate at a 'coo that needs a haircut' in part carrying on the ironic function of the songs) but why the film seeks to make its main opposition interior to Glasgow is probably to be understood in terms of the role played by Johnny as the artist, a point to which I shall return later.

The impulse of the film, then, is to 'reveal' this 'other' Glasgow on the South Side of the Clyde, hitherto undignified by cinematic representation. But, more than this, it is also to do so in a way that will provide something of a novel form to match the novelty of its contents (the working class, the slum). The thrust here then is towards naturalism, towards a minimisation of dramaturgy in pursuit of a more 'authentic' evocation



of the 'non-dramatic' tempo of everyday living. Two main effects become notable.

First, there is a supplanting of conventional sequential narrative structure by one which is loosely episodic and in which there is a minimal accumulation of significance about characters and events. Characters come and go, events take place and are forgotten, what we know at the beginning is not greatly enlarged by what we know at the end (in turn the effect of an absence of mystery, quest or motivation which it is the work of the narrative to fulfil). In many ways, the principle of presentation/revelation becomes an end in itself. Roland Barthes has discussed the role of objects and events in a fiction which seem bereft of any function (in terms of narrative information or character insight) other than their 'effect of the real', their signification that 'we are reality'.<sup>8</sup> And so much of *The Gorbals Story* seems to revel in such a 'reality-display'. The display of Hector (Roddy McMillan), for example, cleaning his boots and then washing his 'smalls' in the sink provides neither insight into his character nor narrative information we would not have otherwise. Its function seems solely to provide an expansion of our sense of what is proper and appropriate to be on the screen and in so doing intimate a message about itself as an 'authentic' reality whose mere presentation is its own justification.

The second main effect, and again part and parcel of the film's pursuit of naturalistic fidelity, is its abandonment of a central hero and corresponding multiplication of leading *dramatis personae* (although the story is ostensibly Johnny's flashback it is a flashback which repeatedly forgets him and takes itself out of his 'control'). In part this helps produce the beginnings of a collectivist ideology whereby mutual support and aid predominate over individual self-fulfilment and self-advancement. But, even more markedly, it helps establish a quite vivid expansion of what we might call the domestic or private sphere. Raymond Williams has noted how important in theatrical history was the development of the stage as a room. This impulse, he argues, derived not only from a scientific insistence on the intimate relationship between character and environment, but a crucial refocusing of the central site of human action – that of the bourgeois family's private domestic room. 'This is the life of the bourgeois family, where the important things occur in that kind of family room'.<sup>9</sup> What seems so striking about *The Gorbals Story* is how it appropriates that domestic sphere but in a way which completely explodes the inwardness and isolation of the bourgeois family drama. The families in *The Gorbals Story* have no exclusive control over their domestic space and their relations with the other characters are left quite confusingly vague. The home, indeed, becomes open to all comers such that when Wullie (Howard Connell) announces the details of his winning coupon it serves as the cue for what seems to be the entire cast to find their way into his bedroom. It might



be argued that the thrust of such a strategy is precisely negative. It is, indeed, the search for a private space — 'a home of our own' — which the film is all about. But in the process of working itself out the momentum is the opposite, a widening of our sense of what the home and family consists in and an undermining of the 'privatisation' implicit in the family drama.

But that said it should nonetheless be recognised that the sphere of domesticity still remains the film's limits. For what seems to disable above all the film's attempt to project the working class on to the screen is the systematic absence of work and politics and a sense of structural as opposed to inter-personal social relations. As has been already noted, while the film initially locates itself in relation to the Clyde, it does so in a way that crucially omits what the other Unity plays and a film like *Floodtide* made central: shipbuilding and industrial labour. Only two characters in *The Gorbals Story* are indicated as in any way working (and in the case of Wullie, the emphasis is exactly opposite) and even these are in occupations marginal to the industrial system (baker and usherette). Likewise with politics: while the play addressed itself directly to the post-war housing shortage and the accompanying disillusionment with the promised 'homes fit for heroes', the film chooses to diminish these in a way which makes the housing problem diffuse and unspecific. Thus when a homeless couple appear on the screen in search of



Undermining the privacy of family melodrama: *The Gorbals Story*



somewhere to stay it merely serves to signify a distress without any particular socio-political reference.

Alongside this suppression of political reference the film also succeeds in removing a number of interesting tensions that occasionally surface in the play: sexism (Peggie's complaints that 'This is a man's world'); racism (Ahmed's retort that 'Glasgow is white man's country') and religious sectarianism (Peggie's attack on Mrs Reilly's 'blasted papish way of looking at things'). And although the film does take on the play's theme of miscegenation it does so in a way that is completely untroubled. Indeed, insofar as the film signifies cultural and ethnic difference at all, it's really only to go on and deny it under an umbrella of universalised humanism ('We may be of different races, religions, sexes, but here in the Gorbals we're all the same').

Indeed, it is possible to go further and argue that not only does the film evacuate socio-historical specifics, but it does so in a way that makes the meanings it projects quite straightforwardly *asocial*. Thus it's not only that poverty and depression are denied any relationship with exterior economic and political structures; in the way they are represented they effectively become a fate or destiny which the working class can only passively bear (a theme indeed made explicit by Johnny's opening remarks).

Two aesthetic strategies enforce this. First is the stylistic emphasis on



Miscegenation in *The Gorbals Story*



enclosure deriving from the central role of domestic interiors. Few of the characters are seen to leave the tenement, the outside becoming for them merely that which lies beyond the window. Indeed, at one point we hear the voices of children shouting for Peggie (Betty Henderson). The camera then takes us outside but not to reveal the children (who remain off screen) but rather Peggie remaining fixedly inside and framed by the window through which she's talking. Of course much of this has to do with the obvious low budget under which the film was made but the point then to note is how such economic stringency has the aesthetic effect of producing a sort of minimalism which in many ways undercuts the film's attempted naturalism and helps reinforce the abstracted and de-contextualised nature of the drama. This move towards abstraction is particularly pronounced with Johnny's visit to the dance-hall and pub ('The Green Tartan'!) with its almost 'noir' deployment of shadow, off-balanced composition and blurred focus. Similarly, with Hector and Wullie's own visit to the pub, in which background is removed altogether and two large beer glasses are superimposed upon the two men drinking. In such a context, then, drink takes on the dimensions of a fatal lure which both reinforces the film's message about the impossibility of its characters' 'escape' and further assists the removal of social and economic reference from their problems. And when we do



'The Green Tartan' with its almost "noir" deployment of shadow, off-balanced composition and blurred focus': *The Gorbals Story*



follow a character into the outside world it hardly becomes an 'escape'. For Johnny it becomes a world of humiliation (the dance-hall) and demoralising drunkenness or, for Wullie and Hector, demoralising drunkenness and violence.

And this very impossibility of 'escape' seems further enforced by the film's overall structure. It has been already noted how the plot avoids the development structure of classical narrative. If anything its *modus operandi* is cyclical rather than linear. Rather than development (the achievement of ends) the film emphasizes repetition (the non-achievement of ends). Thus, the winning coupon which Wullie failed to send off both stylistically (in its repetition of camera set-ups) and thematically (his being doomed to failure) reproduces a message of a world from which there's no way out. And, in a sense, this adds a new dimension to the film's presentation of 'unmotivated' actions. For in a world where nothing can be done, no one action or event can assume a significance over another (cleaning boots is no more or less important than proposing a marriage).

However, there is an important exception to this overall drift. And this is provided by the flashback structure which the film has employed to frame the main drama (and which is an addition to the original play). As noted, the film begins with Johnny in his studio. He has now crossed the river to the West End and become a successful artist. Two



'Demoralising drunkenness and violence': *The Gorbals Story*



effects ensue immediately. First there's a distancing from the contemporaneity of the drama. It is now Johnny's past and although the film is not explicit about it, the very logic of the structure does tend to suggest a characteristic split between the 'bad old days' and the present, when success has been achieved and conditions ameliorated. Second, it helps enforce the decontextualised nature of slum life. For the story now in part becomes Johnny's reverie and the fuel for his artistic imagination – 'the characters who filled my canvas then', as Johnny himself puts it.

But most crucially what the flashback/voice-over structure inserts is a linear dynamic which cuts across the circularity of the rest of the film. Unlike the play where Johnny neither leaves the Gorbals nor is seen to achieve his ambitions to be an artist, the film does seek to dramatise the process and achievement of Johnny's ends. It can only do so, however, by mobilising an ideology of art, whereby Johnny becomes the exceptional individual whose artistic development necessarily requires a social isolation. Johnny can't escape as part of a class, only as an individual endowed with special 'gifts' (the most obvious trait which the film allows being his 'poeticised' discourse which stands in sharp contrast to the more colloquial dialogue of his colleagues). It's a position very close to that of *Young Cassidy* in its treatment of the life of Sean O'Casey. Just as in that film the development of the artist requires a divorce from family, class and nation, so Johnny's advance is predicated upon an 'escape' from his class background. Far from existing in any dynamic or organic relationship with his class, his art can only thrive on separation. We can now see why it is entirely appropriate for Johnny's opening description of Glasgow to omit all reference to class and industry. For in terms of Johnny's development as an artist, they have now become irrelevant. And this in turn links up with how the film also manages to displace so many of its concerns onto questions of Johnny's sexuality. For what essentially propels his story forward is the state of his relations with women: his initial humiliation in front of Nora (Isobel Campbell) at the hands of her father; his subsequent rejection by a girl at the dance-hall; and his final (almost oedipal) attempt at the seduction of Peggie. His struggle to escape from the Gorbals then not only becomes an individualistic quest for artistic success but also sexual fulfilment and, indeed, a 'coming to manhood'. The only (unintentional) irony the film then allows is the *mise en scène* of its beginning whereby Johnny, the mature man and artist, is placed entirely alone in a large and comfortable room staring out through a window to a distant Glasgow beyond.

In effect, then, what seems to happen in the film is the production of an ideology of individual self-achievement (in the form of that most 'individual' of creatures: the 'artist') set against a message of collective passivity whereby the working-class characters can only exist as the fated bearers of a socially and historically de-contextualised 'poverty, hunger,



frustration, depression'. In this respect, Helen Biggar and Norman McLaren's short film of 1936, *Hell Unlimited*, provides a salutary contrast. For what is absent in *The Gorbals Story* – work, politics, structural relations – is most strikingly present in the other. Moreover, the emphasis is on the possibility – indeed crucial centrality – of collective action in the changing of social conditions. Now this contrast is clearly not entirely appropriate. *Hell Unlimited* has a direct agitational intent, whose model is of limited applicability. But what it does raise clearly is the question of how far particular aesthetic methods are appropriate to the achievement of particular ideological ends. The failure of *The Gorbals Story* to present a sense of structural relations and/or collectivised political action was in many ways not that of individual intention (which was probably highly creditable) or bad faith but the complex result of its choice of a naturalist (and in part classical narrative) aesthetic. By contrast *Hell Unlimited's* ability to deal with class and politics was dependent heavily on a break with such an aesthetic and a dizzily courageous attempt to fuse drama, documentary and animation. So before the 'look back' to the thirties and forties produces a new urban-industrial 'Kailyardry' it might just be such a moral that Scots film and drama should be considering.

## Notes

1. For a useful overview of the early achievements of London Unity, see Malcolm Page, 'The Early Years at Unity' in *Theatre Quarterly* Vol. I No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1971, pp. 60-66.
2. Robert Mitchell, *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 5 July 1946.
3. Robert Mitchell, *Forward*, 28 September 1946.
4. See my 'Glasgow Unity Theatre: The Search for a "Scottish People's Theatre"' in *New Edinburgh Review* No. 40, February 1978, pp. 27-31, where I suggest how the notion of 'the people' substituted for a concept of class and ultimately became indistinguishable from that of 'nation'.
5. For further details, see David Hutchinson, *The Modern Scottish Theatre*, Glasgow, 1977.
6. The particular effort of Glasgow Unity is in clear accord with that broader historical trend of realism identified by Raymond Williams in 'A Lecture on Realism', *Screen* Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1977, pp. 61-74. Williams defines the central characteristics of the realist movement in terms of social extension (the inclusion of persons of 'lesser' rank), contemporaneity and secularism, all of which are central in Unity's own challenge to Scots drama. Moreover, Williams' notion of *The Big Flame* representing social extension plus 'hypothesis' is clearly applicable to the work of James Barke.
7. For a fuller account of Glasgow Unity's history, see my 'Towards a Scottish People's Theatre: The Rise and Fall of Glasgow Unity', *Theatre Quarterly* Vol. VII, No. 27, Autumn 1977, pp. 61-70.
8. See Roland Barthes, 'L'effet du réel', *Communications* II, 1968, pp. 84-9.



This notion of the 'reality' produced by a film being in fact a 'textual effect' should clearly be read alongside Colin McArthur's comments, found elsewhere in this volume, on stereotypes, where he argues against the notion that exterior reality could in some way be unproblematically and unmediatedly transferred to the screen.

9. See Williams, op. cit., p.66.

### **The Gorbals Story**

Produced for New World Pictures Ltd. Distributed by Eros. 74 mins.

*Producer* Ernest Gartside

*Director* David MacKane

*Photography* Stanley Clinton

*Assistant Director* Kenneth K. Rick

*Art Director* George Haslam

*Editor* Helen Wiggins

*Music* John Bath

Howard Connell (*Wullie Mutrie*), Marjorie Thomson (*Jean Mutrie*), Betty Henderson (*Peggy Anderson*), Sybil Thomson (*Magdalene*), Eveline Garratt (*Mrs Reilly*), Jack Stewart (*Peter Reilly*), Isobel Campbell (*Nora Reilly*), Russell Hunter (*Johnny Martin*), Roddy McMillan (*Hector*), Lothar Lewinsohn (*Ahmed*), Carl Williamson (*Francie Potter*), Reg Allan (*Alec Cameron*), Alrae Edwards (*Mary Cameron*), Berta Cooper (*Mrs Gilmour*), Ian Dalglish (*Dr Andrews*), Ivor Kissen (*Telegraph Boy*), Archie Duncan (*Bull*), Andrew Keir (*Chucker Out*).



## 8 Scottish Television: What Would It Look Like?

JOHN CAUGHIE

There does seem to be a fairly broad consensus among the Scottish audience that Scottish television is inadequate. More exactly, perhaps, it is not immediately apparent to the Scottish audience why Scottish television should not be as good as that of Granada, Thames, BBC Bristol or BBC Pebble Mill. Of course, this may be an unsophisticated response, innocent of the complexities of advertising and regional structures, but it is a material response, and points to the question of whether Scotland is to be constructed by television as simply another region (and one with a low advertising revenue) or whether it is to be considered as a nation. Clearly, an aspiration towards a national culture cannot be read in any simple way into the dissatisfaction with Scottish television (some of it may be just that Granada gets better movies), but since there is a sense that Scottish television is not adequate it seems useful to try to firm up the terms of inadequacy a little before it is assumed to be the natural condition.

In an average week, British television (excluding the Open University) consists of around 280 programming hours. A viewer in Central Scotland, armed with a video recorder and heroic fortitude, could watch around 24 hours of programmes made in Scotland. Taking a week in March at random (13 – 19 March, 1982) the viewing would look like Table I. Clearly, the figures will vary from week to week. In the week in question, for example, news and current affairs figures were inflated by 3 hours coverage of the Scottish Labour Party conference; both drama and documentary will fluctuate (though much more than one hour of documentary would be a good week); and this does seem like a slightly bad week for education. The chart is not intended to be scientific or definitive, but simply to give an indication of the kinds of concentrations and absences that one might expect to find. Among the concentrations the position of religion is probably the most interesting, sharing almost equal status with sport, light entertainment and drama. Even more striking, however, in this week and in every other week, is the complete absence from the Scottish schedules of those staples of popular television, the situation comedy and the police series. In fact, staggeringly but appropriately, in this particular week dramatic fiction was



TABLE I

<i>Programme category</i>	<i>BBC</i>	<i>STV</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>No. of programmes</i>
News & current affairs	4'05"	5'45"	9'50"	28
Sport	1'05"	1'10"	2'15"	4
Drama (all forms)	1'15"	1'00"	2'15"	4
Light entertainment	30"	1'35"	2'05"	6
Religion	35"	1'25"	2'00"	10
Arts	50"	30"	1'20"	3
Gaelic programmes	55"	15"	1'10"	3
Documentary	1'05"	—	1'05"	2
Children	—	45"	45"	1
Magazine (for women?)	30"	—	30"	1
Education	25"	—	25"	1
<i>Totals</i>	11'15"	12'25"	23'40"	63

represented exclusively by domestic serials: *King's Royal* (a Victorian costume family drama), *Maggie*, *Take the High Road*.

Now, two things have to be said about this. The first is that many of the features of Scottish television are also features of English regional television. Thus, the record of Scottish television in drama production is probably as good as, or better than, the majority of English BBC regional production centres (with the exception of Pebble Mill) or the non-network independent companies. We probably have to recognise that scheduling and coverage in Scotland is probably not much worse than in many of the English regions. All that that recognition does, however, is to throw the question back onto the embarrassment which Scotland creates within a rigidly regional structure: the question of nation and region, and the forms of representation (in both the political and the discursive sense) which the distinction between the two involves.

The second thing to be said is that the kinds of programmes which are produced in Scotland are as likely to be the result of institutional constraints as they are to be produced out of institutional and/or cultural intent. Leaving aside television's relationship with the State (which makes it unlikely, for instance, that BBC Scotland will ever make an appeal for civil disobedience), the most apparent level of institutional constraint is the financial level. BBC Scotland receives its money from the central administration in London, and STV and Grampian are dependent on advertising revenue. The fact that STV's audience is only around five million limits the amount of revenue it can expect from advertising, and this limitation affects not only the number of programmes it is possible to make, but also the kinds of programmes. Simply,



religion is cheaper than situation comedy, and that has to be taken into account before we seize on the predominance of religion and the absence of sitcom as a straightforward expression of the 'essential Scottish character'. In a more complex and less demonstrable way, it seems likely that there is a certain pressure on Scottish television producers to privilege the image of Scotland which is nationally marketable. Just as British television as a whole is increasingly dependent on the kinds of dramatisations and serializations which will attract co-production finance and international sales, so Scottish television looks for financial and prestigious approval to London and the independent network. The marketable image is construed as the one which confirms rather than challenges the dominant discourses of Scottishness. At a more material level, the institutional hierarchies of regionalism and network seem always to locate professional 'success' somewhere along the high road that leads to London.

Any discussion of Scottish television, then, has to start from a recognition that the complex and often contradictory institutional constraints of television are material factors in the production and circulation of television discourses.

Two other problems emerge from my chart of programme categories which go some way towards explaining the strategy and limitations of this essay. In the first place, it is difficult to hit a moving target. To tackle television on the basis of a single week selected at random is to invite the easy defence that this is not a typical week, that you should have seen what was on the week before, that there are plans for a whole new series which will present the very thing which is absent in this week. There is a familiar liturgy which goes on between audience and producers in which ritual accusation of neglect is met with ritual response, memories of *The White Heather Club* are met with memories of *Sunset Song*, *Thingummyjig* is met with *A Sense of Freedom*, *Take the High Road* is met with audience ratings, and Hogmanay only happens once a year. Nobody wins, but the producers are on the inside track because they have trained memories. It is precisely for this reason that I claim no definitive status for my chart: it is not there to prove anything, but simply to give a little solidity to a few impressions. More importantly, it is for this reason also that I want to avoid a detailed discussion of programmes. The attacks and arguments around Scottish television which are based on programmes always seem to be blocked by the same implicit or explicit counter-attack: you may not like *Thingummyjig* but thousands of people do. This is not to invalidate the detailed analysis of programmes, but to try to side-step for a moment the kind of sterile debate that goes on around ratings and levels of popularity, and pose the question instead of the kinds of programmes which are not made, and the kinds of discourse and forms of discourse which are not offered.

Secondly, the very diversity of television programmes and television



categories poses a problem. While it is possible to trace discursive traditions with a certain continuity within the novel or in film, it seems more difficult to trace such continuities across the plurality of forms and categories of television. At the very least, such a tracing would demand an analysis of programmes and programme types more exact than could be attempted here. My main interest here is in the dramatic forms of Scottish television, but more in the possibilities which these forms offer than in the analysis of actual examples. The privilege which is given to debates around drama is partly to delimit the field, to find a focus within the diversity of programme categories. Partly also it is strategic; drama occupies a prestigious, but also a somewhat unstable position within television which seems to make it more accessible than most forms of television to public debate. But mainly it is because dramatic forms seem to me to occupy a particularly prominent place within the discourses of television which construct a notion of Scottishness. It is the fictional and dramatic representation of Scotland and Scottishness which seems to offer the points of identification for a Scottish identity.

The essay, then, is preliminary, and recognises clear limits. Faced with the diversity of television, it focuses on certain broad cultural debates which are most appropriate to drama, and it tries to avoid arguments about programmes. Put another way, the article looks for tactical advantage by refusing to engage with television on its own ground. I am less concerned, here, with actually existing Scottish television, than with the *possibility* of a Scottish television: what would it look like? In that sense, I am ultimately more interested in the structured and structuring absences of Scottish television, in the kinds of cultural discourses which are systematically refused, than in the analysis and assessment of actual programmes. While we have to pay due attention to the financial, structural, institutional constraints of Scottish television, it seems to me that we also have to recognise that one of the most massive inadequacies of Scottish television is the absence of any sense of an engagement with a developed notion of national culture or national identity which goes beyond the reflection of an always already constructed 'Scottishness'. The professional ideologies and discourses of television, inflected historically by notions of impartiality, pluralism and paternalism, simply seem to offer no place for such an engagement to articulate itself. It seems not to be the business of television. It is in this radical sense, in its lack of engagement, rather than in the sense of good or bad programmes, that Scottish television is at best inadequate, at worst inimical to the development of Scottish culture.

Now the idea of a national culture and a national identity is slippery ground, and one has to work hard to forget some of the uses to which the idea has been put before the terms can be used without embarrassment. The association of culture with politically reactionary notions of tradition, refinement and the preservation of values has a long history.



Notoriously, the 'Anarchy' for which Matthew Arnold prescribed the antidote of 'Culture' was nothing other than working-class resistance. For Coleridge and for Leavis culture was a delicate plant which had to be cultivated and protected by a 'Clerisy' or a 'University'. Opposed to anarchy and barbarism, it was a way of holding things together in the face of urbanized and industrialized society.

In the more robust and political definitions of culture which appeared in the fifties and sixties through the work of E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, and in the extension of the possibility of culture to the working class, something of the notion of holding things together survives in the close relationship which is posed between culture and class identity. Developing from these definitions, it would be the role of a national culture to provide points of identification around which individuals or groups could discover or recognise their 'Scottishness', a Scottishness which can then be held together as a special and unique identity in the face of the pressures towards nationless and classless homogeneity. Such a view exists in regressive and in progressive forms. In its regressive forms, national culture becomes the celebration of national identity, a national identity which is always already given, steeped in the blood of Flodden and Culloden, emblemized in the indomitable thistle, and sung in 'Flower of Scotland' ('That fought and died for your wee bit hill and glen'). In its progressive forms, it is concerned with positive images of Scotland, with the establishment by discovery or recovery of a Scottish identity and Scottish traditions which can be mobilized as the basis for political action; the recovery, for example, of a Scottish history which escapes the Celtic twilight and brings real struggles and resistances into the light.

There are real strengths in this tradition of thinking about culture, but there are also problems. Particularly, there is a constant danger of slipping into the notion of an ideal identity formed in the past, of constructing a national culture as a reservoir of traditions simply to be tapped, and of producing a static and stable history which can be called upon to bring forth its heroes and heroines. It is precisely the regressiveness of the frozen discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard that they provide just such a reservoir of Scottish 'characters', Scottish 'attitudes' and Scottish 'views' which can be drawn upon to give the 'flavour of Scotland', a petrified culture with a misty, mythic, and above all, static past. But, as Colin McArthur shows, even the attempt to replace an obviously regressive discourse with a supposedly progressive one, the identity of Tartanry/Kailyard with the identity of 'Scotland on the Move', is doomed to failure if it does not also engage with the forms of representation, and with culture as something more than the expression of an already given identity.

The association of culture with identity comes under pressure from



certain areas of modernist criticism. Here, culture is not something which already exists, identity is not in any simple way historically or socially given, a national culture is not a reservoir to be tapped, and the cultural project is to shake things loose rather than hold them together. A genuine culture, this argument goes, is continually in process, produced not simply out of the will of the people for self-definition, but out of the contradictions and differences of the discourses and practices which make it up. In its politically modernist sense, culture has to do with transformation rather than stability, situating itself within social contradiction and historical change, resisting the stasis and unity of achieved and completed identity. Such a view clearly relies on contradiction as the motor force of history, not simply contradictions between classes and nations but also contradictions within the nation and the class. A national culture would be one which confronted and opened out the specific contradictions of the historical development of the nation, using contradiction to continually transform a national identity which was never given and will never be completed.

Whatever the apparent contradictions which are involved, it seems necessary to me to hold these views of culture together. Even the regressively chauvinistic celebration of the uniqueness of the Scottish character has a political potency which cannot be dismissed as insignificant, though it's hard to see how it could be mobilized in any reliable way. Progressive approaches to culture also have risks attached. If the danger of the one is the fixity of achieved identity and uncritical identification, the risk of the other is that by denying identity any fixity at all it makes political action impossible because there is no position left from which to act. To try to hold the positions together is not simply fence-sitting: there is a necessary interlocking of the political need for fixed and fortified positions and the theoretical insistence on the primacy of contradiction. The one checks the other, and produces the grounds for the political debate about culture.

This begins to look dangerously like a highly specialized academic argument without much connection to television. But what I am trying to do, somewhat desperately perhaps, is open up the notion of culture, *political* culture, as a problematic term and one which cannot be appealed to as simply a good thing. It seems impossible to construct the argument about national culture without breaking the sense of culture as an unproblematic consensus term on which we all agree, and which we all support in the same way. This construction of the argument is necessary for a consideration of Scottish television. Most apparently, it points to what we are not getting and might help to define what it is we want. But more importantly, it suggests some of the debates which have to take place if Scottish television is to play any useful part in the development and transformation of national culture and national identity: debates, in the context of television, not only about the politics of



national culture but also about the forms and modes of discourse which are appropriate to it.

One of these debates, which has been central to the contemporary development of literature and film though it has been almost completely ignored by television, is the debate between modernism and realism. In his essay, Colin McArthur makes the case for a Scottish cinema to engage with modernism. For cinema, it's a case which I would completely support. But at the same time, the debate between modernism and realism takes place within the same arena as the debate about culture. The same political issues of identity and contradiction are at stake; and to endorse modernism involves taking a certain position within that debate. The argument has been that realism achieves its readability and its stability by repressing or resolving contradiction, and by offering the reader or the spectator a smooth flow of identification and uncritical points of view. Modernism, on the other hand, has sought to engage with contradiction, opening out its effectiveness, constructing the world as unstable and therefore changeable (the formulation echoes Brecht who is frequently appealed to as the exemplary political modernist) and denying the reader the comfort of secure positions and established ways of seeing. The relationship between this debate and the debate about culture is clear, each revolving around notions of contradiction and identity. Even allowing for the crudity of opposition, for cinema and for literature the debate between modernism and realism has been extremely productive, and I am happy to polemicize on behalf of modernism. But for television, I am less confident. Partly, it is a simple pessimism that the conditions of television would marginalise modernism, and give it a prestigious place in an intellectual ghetto. But more fundamentally, I am simply not sure that the opposition of modernism to realism, and the partisan support of the one against the other, is particularly appropriate – strategically politically, or theoretically – to the specific conditions of television, to the way it is produced or to the way it is watched. Basically, I would want to hold open the possibility that television's particular function in the development of a national culture – what it can do best as a popular form – is less to unsettle and unfix identity, than it is to recover, circulate and develop the progressive traditions which exist in the culture. At the very least, television, much more than cinema or literature, demands a plural strategy. Somewhat to my surprise, while looking to the traditions of modernism to unsettle established ways of looking and to unfix received identities, I would also want to pose the possibilities of naturalism.

If the endorsement of cinematic modernism as a political intervention looks to Europe for its exemplary texts, the defence of naturalism might look to the Third World; for example, to the Senegalese films of Ousmane Sembene, or to Cuban films like *Portrait of Teresa* or the



work of Sara Gomez. Here, exactly in a cinema which has engaged with questions of national identity and the contradictions which it poses, forms of cinematic naturalism have developed which refuse unified narratives and the seductive identifications of European realist cinema, attempting to confront the unevenness of national development, while at the same time resisting the social exclusiveness of 'difficult' modernist cinema. What is frequently forgotten in the debate between realism and modernism, is that naturalism historically has had associations with progressiveness, however vague and reformist that progressiveness may have been. Most of these associations have been buried under the weight of critical and theoretical opinion that naturalism is simply bad and boring realism; but it is still just possible to read the naturalism of Zola at the end of the 19th century as an attempt to introduce emerging classes, the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, into a literary discourse which had systematically excluded them, and to give those classes identities which depended less on smoothly flowing narratives and identifications than on 'objective' reports on the actual conditions and environments of their existence. The attempt was in many ways diverted by political uncertainty and by the demands of 'good literature', but the intention can be read in Zola's theoretical and polemical writing. Sembene's films or the Cuban films are more politically sophisticated, but the objective is similar: to represent an emerging nation (and class) to itself through the material struggles and contradictions of its people, taking place in recognizable contexts, rather than through idealized and fictionalized identities.

The posing of connections between the development of national culture and identity in the emerging nations of the Third World and questions of political culture in Scotland is attractive. What I want to make of it here is simply to reaffirm that cultural and aesthetic debates have political and historical determinations. At particular points in its historical development it may be necessary for a nation or a class or a social or sexual formation to have available to it a form of cultural discourse in which it can construct some notion of identity which will form the basis of political action. Within certain conditions, of which television may be one, this may be more important than an engagement with modernism, though its political sophistication will depend not on its capacity simply to reflect uncritically the lives of the people, but on its ability to engage productively with their specific contradictions. Certain aspects of Third World cinema suggest that this can be approached through inflections of naturalism. Given the institutional and discursive constraints of television, the progressive development of naturalism may be an appropriate strategy in the attempt to produce a national culture. At least it should be brought into the debate.

The massive failure of actually existing Scottish television, then, is that not only has it not engaged with modernism (developing the in-



itiative, perhaps, of James McTaggart), but it has not even engaged with the possibility of a naturalism which is capable of doing what naturalism was invented to do. Such a failure is particularly marked in the recent context of Scottish drama and film. The plays of Unity, the working-class theatres and cinemas of the thirties, and the whole documentary impulse form a complex basis on which a progressive and native tradition of naturalism could have been developed. Scottish television has not only failed to produce a new tradition of national drama, it has even neglected the retrieval and circulation of the native traditions which were there.

The regressive traditions of Tartanry and Kailyard are clearly central to debates about a Scottish national culture, as most of this book testifies. But television relates to these traditions in complex ways, and it is difficult to identify them as an absolutely consistent and dominant discourse within the diversity and plurality of discourses which television uniquely offers. At the same time, the memory of *The White Heather Club* lingers on as if it were only yesterday, the voice of the Laird of Cowcaddens still rings in the ears, and although Hogmanay specials only happen once a year it takes at least twelve months to forget them. As well as being almost fascinating in their awfulness, such programmes have a particular regressive potency precisely because they slot into the recognisable discourses so smoothly. However infrequent they may be, they have a certain defining power, confirming and reinforcing the image of the 'essentially Scottish'.

But more fundamentally for television, the problem is in the absence of a consistently alternative discourse. It is not necessarily that *Dr Finlay's Casebook* was any more regressive than *All Creatures Great and Small* in its representations of national character, or that *Take the High Road* is any worse than *Emmerdale Farm*. It is not even that any of these programmes are particularly dreadful in themselves. The question returns to institutions. It is simply that there is a limited amount of space within the schedules and a limited amount of institutional and financial support for the production of Scottish discourses, with the result that there is a highly restricted range of images available for the representation of Scottishness. Whereas the representations of English country life in *All Creatures Great and Small* take their place within a range of other images from situation comedies, police series, single plays, classic serials, drama documentaries and soap operas, the representations of *Dr Finlay's Casebook* or *Take the High Road* become the only consistent and recurrent images of Scottishness available at the time.

And the compulsion towards Kailyard, particularly, is compounded by a tradition of Scottish acting. Cut off from the popular and political tradition of naturalistic theatre exemplified by Unity (the tradition in which most of the older generation of actors grew up) there is a tenden-



cy for the familiar faces of Scottish acting to become Scottish 'characters', continually reviving and consolidating the roles provided by the Kailyard tradition. One can almost sympathise with the predicament of the BBC over *King's Royal*, its Sunday evening prestige serial about the struggles for power within a nineteenth-century Glasgow whisky family. In an attempt to break the mould, English actors were cast in the three main male parts, scandalizing (with justification) the Scottish branch of Equity, and (with less justification) the letters pages of the Scottish press. In fact, the 'scandal' of *King's Royal* was precisely that English actors, hired to bring new faces to Scottish drama, could do nothing more than parody and confirm the only representation of Scottishness which was familiar to them: the acting style of the Kailyard, the accents and manner of a fictional stage Scotland, unspecific in class or place.

To break with the Tartanry/Kailyard tradition would involve an active engagement with other traditions and other versions of history: the traditions, for example, of the literature and theatre based in working-class experience which, since the twenties, have seemed to offer the only real and consistent basis for a Scottish national culture; and the histories of resistance and struggle exemplified by Red Clydeside, the Crofters' Wars, or the Lanarkshire weavers. It may be politically naive, but it does not seem unthinkable to wonder why Scottish television has assisted in the repression of these traditions and histories. Even apart from providing cultural and political alternatives to the Tartanry/Kailyard traditions, they also look like more exciting television. Within the present conditions of television, simply to recover these alternative discourses, without even attempting (yet) to confront the contradictions of actual present struggles, would give Scottish television the beginning of a real engagement with Scottish culture.

To confront television with specific demands based on concrete absences is to invite the same kind of ritual responses as the attack on the quality and standards of actual programmes: there are institutional and financial constraints, there are no writers, and there are plans in the pipeline. However wearying these responses may be, they are also real. Indeed, STV is, at this very moment, filming a history of Scotland to be transmitted as an extended series, and, however cynical one may feel, it would be unreasonable at this point to assume that such a history would not present in a productive way some of the histories of popular struggle. It has to be said also that STV transmitted a few years ago a documentary on MacDiarmid which exposed some of the traditions to which I have referred. Such moments have to be cherished and encouraged. But insofar as this article can make concrete demands, it is not simply for individual programmes, but for a consistent engagement on the part of Scottish television in all its programmes with the idea and the contradictions of Scotland as a nation, and with the debates about



identity and the development and transformation of a national culture. Once the engagement is there, then we can ask for better programmes and other forms of discourse.